

# Brigade

autumn 2014

Protecting lives  
and property

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## ▼ FEATURE: When ICCs fire up



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COVER PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

WHEN ICCs FIRE UP 16



## Reaching the next generation of adults

As our children returned to school, fires were burning in Victoria.

CFA has worked long and hard to get fire safety messages into primary schools. Many of you have put countless hours into the Fire Safe Kids program, previously Brigades in Schools which began in 1997. (There are also a few dogs who have learned to stop, drop and roll for the children – and for a snack treat.)

The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission said that, "Educating children about... safety in the event of bushfire will probably influence not only the children but also their parents, siblings and extended family and community".

Our education programs have been delivered to more than 20,000 students every year. That number will increase this year as we launch the secondary school bushfire education program Fire Safe Youth in CFA areas. This follows a successful pilot in a handful of schools around the state and fills an acknowledged gap in educating our young people. We're proud of it.

This program will focus primarily on creating awareness of fire safety strategies to build and strengthen self-reliant, resilient communities. Encouraging responsibility appropriate to their ages helps children and young people – our future community leaders – become self-reliant, prepared in emergencies to help themselves and others. It might also encourage them to join their local fire brigade.

Fire safety education needs to be flexible and adapt to both mainstream and Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) requirements. Fire Safe Youth covers bushfire and home fire safety. Lessons are specifically tailored for Years 7 to 10 but can also be adapted for Years 11 and 12. The goal of Fire Safe Youth is to inspire interest in the topic which will lead to more in-depth study.

Our studies have shown us that teachers are unfamiliar with fire safety content and therefore apprehensive about teaching it. With a CFA expert working as a guest speaker, however, their enthusiasm increases. Secondary schools also need teaching materials and that is now provided online and through the *Bushfires* publication written in conjunction with the Geography Teachers' Association of Victoria. Go to [cfa.vic.gov.au](http://cfa.vic.gov.au) and search for 'Secondary school resources' to see the full range of material now available.

Fire Safe Youth builds on all we have learned from Fire Safe Kids. Its success will depend on solid partnerships between schools, brigades, regions and CFA headquarters.

The program will be available for statewide implementation following the rollout of CFA member training sessions this year in the two units of competency within the Public Safety Training Package:

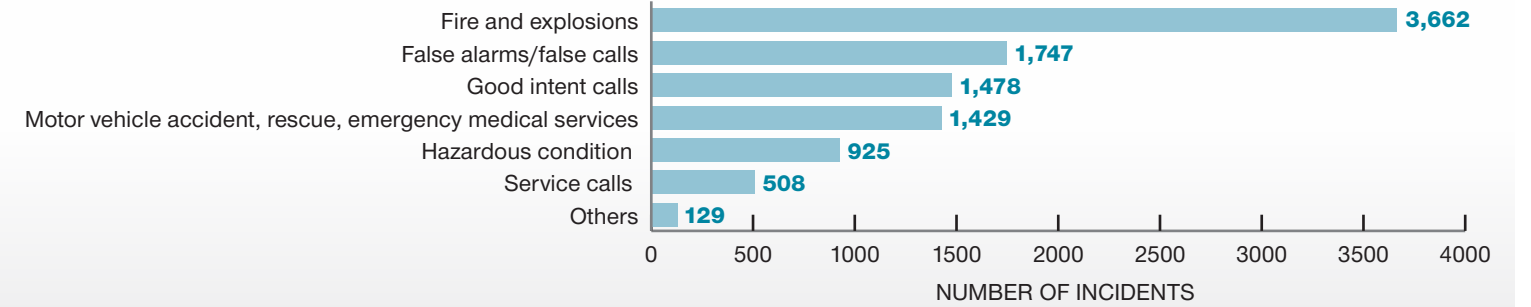
- Foster a positive organisational image in the community
- Plan and conduct a public awareness program.

Any interested members are warmly invited to discuss training with their captain, training officer or community education coordinator. We welcome your interest, energy and social connectedness to help us get these vital messages across to the next generation of adults.

## Incident summary

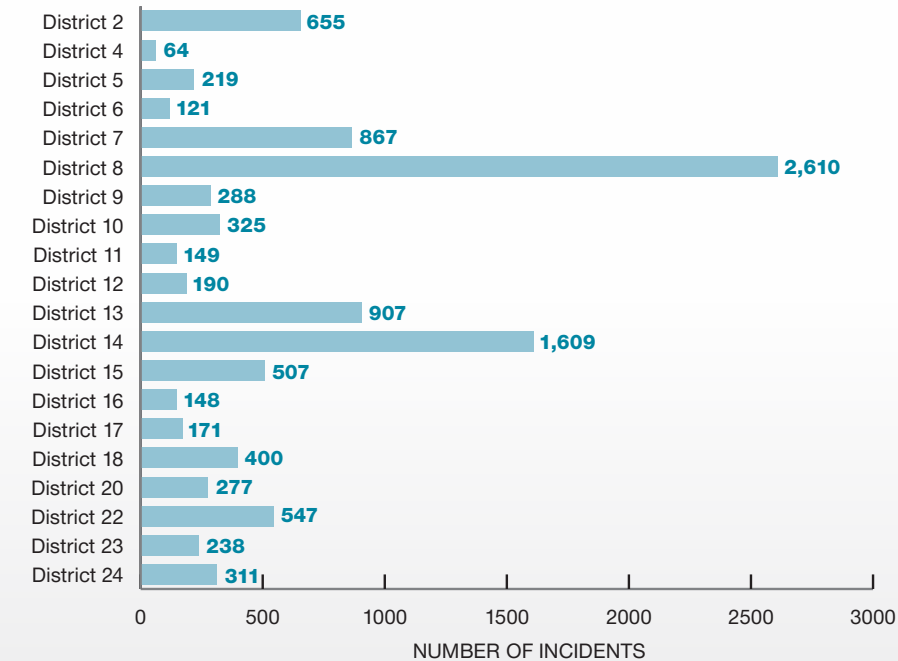
STATEWIDE INCIDENTS BY TYPE

1 October – 31 December 2013



STATEWIDE INCIDENTS BY DISTRICT

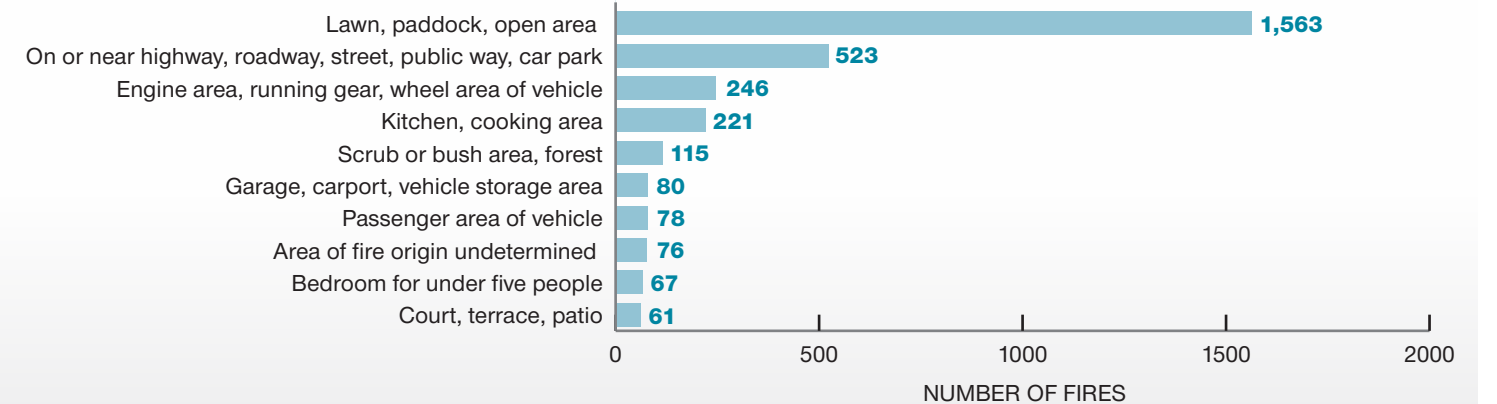
1 October – 31 December 2013



Brigades are reminded to submit their fire/incident report as soon as possible after attending an incident. Brigades on strike teams also need to submit a report. FIRS Call Centre, 1800 628 844, is open daily 8am-11pm.

ORIGIN OF FIRE

1 October – 31 December 2013



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# JANUARY HEATWAVE CHALLENGES FIREFIGHTERS



**Above:**  
Grampians Northern  
Complex fire

PHOTO: WAYNE RIGG

Lightning strikes during the mid-January heatwave across Victoria started many fires, and strong winds caused erratic fire behaviour. The most significant fires were the Grampians Northern Complex (which burnt 55,100 hectares), the Mallee Complex (around 110,000 hectares) and in East Gippsland, where there were more than 30 fires burning out of control by the end of the week.

A life and 32 homes were lost in the Grampians, more than 350km of fencing in the Grampians, Loddon Mallee and Gippsland, while more than 6,000 railway sleepers were destroyed in Loddon Mallee which disrupted the Mildura rail line until well into February.

## GRAMPIANS NORTHERN COMPLEX

The fire began as two bushfires travelling in a southerly direction from Pohlner Road, Wartook, towards the Wartook Valley, with spot fires and ember attack at Roses Gap.

Emergency Warnings were first issued for Wartook, Heathvale, Brimpaen and Laharum. Emergency Warnings were also issued for Halls Gap, Pomonal and Dadswells Bridge as the fire travelled south, and residents and visitors were advised to evacuate on 17 January.

The fire came within three kilometres of Halls Gap. A month earlier, Halls Gap tourism businesses met with Chief Officer Euan Ferguson and Parks Victoria to prepare for just this eventuality: bushfires arriving in their peak season. They discussed how business and emergency services could better work together and held bushfire planning workshops. Businesses also received the new Tourism Business Fire Ready Kit, learned about their local fire risk, the warnings system, and what resources and support are available to help them communicate with guests.

Halls Gap residents were allowed back on 18 January as the threat subsided. Residents around the Wartook Valley were escorted back to their homes on 19 January by Victoria Police and emergency services, and Roses Gap and Dadswells Bridge residents returned a day later.

At the height of the fire the perimeter was 257 kilometres, with more than 700 firefighters, 90 tankers and 30 slip-on vehicles at the scene as well as five fixed-wing aircraft and seven helicopters.

Incident Controller Mark Gunning talked to *Brigade* magazine on 21 January, shortly after the fire was contained.

"This is a significant milestone for Grampians' communities, with emergency and recovery services now focusing on returning residents in fire-affected areas to their homes and opening roads," Mark said.

"Over the past few days, firefighters have focused on back burning around the Mount Difficult Range near Halls Gap as well as establishing and consolidating control and containment lines.

"While there has been some fantastic work done by emergency services crews to contain this fire, we need to keep in mind that many residents have been affected and some have lost their homes. This is a difficult time for them and, moving into the recovery stage, we will do all we can to help them and local businesses get back on their feet."

Crews continued to patrol the fire for several days and performed hazardous tree assessments along the fire's edge and surrounding roads and on properties.

Separate to the Grampians Northern Complex, a fire was also burning in mainly inaccessible terrain at Black Range, Bunjils Cave Road, south-west of Stawell. Crews focused on a direct attack of the northern sector and the consolidation of containment lines to protect the township of Stawell.

## MALLEE COMPLEX

The three largest Mallee region fires were Wyperfeld National Park – Lake Albacutya Wirrengren Plain near Yaapeet (56,500 hectares, contained on 29 January); Big Desert Wilderness Park (30,000 hectares, contained on 22 January); and Bronzewing – Sunraysia Highway (14,100 hectares, contained on 20 January).

On 17 January, Emergency Warnings were issued to residents at Hopetoun West, Hopevale and Kenmare (near Wyperfeld National Park), and residents at Ouyen, Pier Milan and Tempy (near Bronzewing Flora and Fauna Reserve).

Towards the end of the heatwave, there were around 250 firefighters, 25 tankers, 11 dozers, and 32 slip-ons working on these fires.

## Wyperfeld National Park

Yaapeet Fire Brigade battled the Paradise and Lake Albacutya fires alongside Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) with magnificent back-up from strike teams.

"The first warning went out on the Tuesday night [14 January]," said Yaapeet Captain Troy Fisher, "and these were both lightning strike fires. The wind was gusting all over the place, chopping and changing. It already had a 500-metre front by the time we got out there – we couldn't believe it. We'd think we had things under control but we were just chasing it and couldn't catch up. It made a run to the east; half an hour later it made a run to the west. The first report back to Swan Hill was that the fire had already burnt about 400 hectares.

"We got strike teams in from Swan Hill and Mildura that first night before it made a run and burnt about 2,000 acres in about 25 minutes. We had one really experienced member from Swan Hill who said he'd never seen fire behaviour like it. It burnt the lake bed that first night which is grass, short shrubbery and red gums.

"Over three nights I had about nine hours sleep and everyone else was in pretty much the same boat. On Friday afternoon, we had a spot over that burnt 550 hectares very quickly and we were lucky to pull that one up.

"By that day we had heaps of strike teams with about 40 trucks at the staging area, crewed by some people from the other side of Bendigo and Melbourne. A week later, we saw people coming back on strike teams for a second and third time so they were becoming familiar faces. The locals couldn't believe how far people came to help out.

"Private machinery saved the day. We had 4WD tractors driven by brigade members. One had a grader board putting out spot fires and another with an offset disc ploughed paddocks to turn dirt over on to the fire. We were lucky to have them – they're not used much in farming now.

"We've had DEPI air support from Rainbow and Linga and the three bombers were a massive help slowing down one of the main flanks.

"We've been stretched but it's been a huge team effort."

Joining that team effort were members from Huntly deployed with their tanker – one of the few in District 2 with Class B foam capacity – to the Linga DEPI water bombing headquarters. They were given three main tasks. Member Alan Roberts listed them as, "One, asset protection for the air base if fire should come out of the bush; two, response in the very unlikely event of an aircraft emergency; three, to assist with any other activities at the air base including dust mitigation.

"Another important job was pressure washing the air tractors. Solidified retardant would build up on the rear of them which caked on in big chunks. My guess is that the pilots could feel when there was too much build-up and that's where we came in.

## leadership

Be willing to be adaptable and champion change

**Below:**  
Approaching the fire  
near Halls Gap

PHOTO: DES BATTEN





**Above left:**  
Mount Delegate Group Officer Andy Bennett (left) with Gippsland Regional Director Mark Potter

PHOTO: ROB MELVILLE

**Above right:**  
Task force 1030 in East Gippsland

PHOTO: KAREN WHITEHURST

**Bottom right:**  
District mechanical officers keep the trucks running

PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

"It was a really good tour of duty. We saw how slick and professional the whole operation was. The pilots were excellent."

In a two-week period responding to the Mallee fires, the air tractors flew 600 loads of retardant.

### Bronzewing – Sunraysia Highway

For the first time in living memory, fire threatened Ouyen. On Friday 17 January, lightning struck south of the town in the Bronzewing Bushland Flora and Fauna Park.

"We were called on Wednesday evening just on dark," said Ouyen Captain Trevor Mills, "and there was a hell of a glow in the sky. We thought we were in trouble, but it was still in the park."

"The district was already heavily committed at Lake Albacutya and other fires but our group and the Southern Mallee Group turned out in force to support us, along with some brigades from further away.

"I was in the local command facility at our station on Friday night trying to coordinate things, keeping an ear to the ground and keeping Melbourne, Mildura, Swan Hill district and our crews informed. Then came the late southerly wind change and it turned pear-shaped for a while. The wind, dust and soot on the fireground were so intense that one of our guys told me he couldn't even see his hand in front of his face. The glow disappeared and we had no idea where the fire was. If the fire got away to Ouyen, we had about an hour's grace.

"An Emergency Warning went out and residents were woken at about 11.45pm by phones ringing their heads off and the message given was to stay in place. It was a wake-up call for the town in all senses.

"I've never been so worried. When you go to a fire you can always see that red but what I think happened was the fire went to ground and blew itself out. Still, we made the right call in those conditions and I absolutely support the warning that went out.

"It was a learning curve for me. We've never had a fire closer than five kilometres from town. I think a lot of people really



woke up to the risk – we've always considered ourselves a safe town. There will now be community training days where people will have support from CFA to either improve their bushfire plan or create their plan.

"We've also had some young people in the brigade really step up. I think this has strengthened the brigade and the group, which really united into a strong working unit. Planning over the years by some level-headed people has come to the fore. Even with the district workload, we had about 23 vehicles in the town that Friday night.

"The brigade put on a thank you barbecue at our station. It was arranged within 24 hours and about 200 people turned up. It's probably right to say that a majority of them had never come into our new station before. We wanted to thank people like the farmers who called us with updates and used their disc ploughs. The stories came out and it turned into the best debrief we've ever had. It was a great night and I commend the brigade and the community."

### GIPPSLAND

By Friday 17 January, there were 32 bushfires burning out of control across the Gippsland region. The major fires were a cluster at Club Terrace (north-west of Cann River), several at Glenaladale (north-west of Bairnsdale), Westbury and several near the township of Goongerah; an area of deep forest, tall trees and limited tracks.

The Snowy River cluster of fires, mostly in the Snowy River National Park near Gelantipy, burnt 66,000 hectares of very remote and rugged country. In early February, it grew substantially in size to 15,000 hectares, then trebled in size on 9 February under hot and windy conditions.

Some of these fires joined up and were still burning in late-February, becoming the Club Terrace cluster and Goongerah-Deddick (see story on page 8).

### Goongerah fires

Andy Bennett is a long-time Goongerah resident, was captain of Goongerah brigade for its first 10 years and is now Mount Delegate group officer. He talked to *Brigade* magazine on 7 February as the township remained under threat.

"DEPI crews attended on Friday 17 January but they were pulled out because the fire activity was too intense. It was spotting around and behind them. They were tasked with asset protection around Goongerah – private properties, the primary school, the hall, the CFA shed. By Saturday, aerial reconnaissance told us there were 10 fires burning all within cooee of Goongerah.

"DEPI stayed on asset protection until the 25th when we were lucky to get about 21 millilitres of rain. They built tracks around houses. They'd been working with high fuel loads all that time but in benign conditions. Back burning was incredibly tricky. They built an eastern containment line behind the school which is about four kilometres long and it took them three days because of how slowly they had to move and the precautions they took. It was painstaking and they did a great job. We have a very good relationship with them.

"Aircraft are operating out of Marlo and the Delegate airstrip. There have been about five bombers in all working it. There have been a fixed-wing and at least three choppers getting water from a dam about 150 metres from my house. The noise is phenomenal. It's like *Apocalypse Now* revisited!

"We've had CFA strike teams with trucks from Paynesville through to Mallacoota. The Orbost group has come. There are lots of dozers, excavators and mulchers out there. We've got crews from interstate and New Zealand and the Kiwis are adding a touch of colour to radio communications! The outside assistance has been great and invaluable."

There's no mobile phone coverage in Goongerah. Watch and Acts and an Emergency Evacuation Warning were received on landlines.

"The weather is going to stop these fires," said Andy. "We can't put them out. It's a waiting game but not sit-and-wait. There's a lot of activity, a lot of preparation and construction of fallback lines.

"This little fire has generated significant interest around here. It's been a good education all round. People have left their politics at home and worked towards a common goal. They've seen each other in a different light, all doing the long hours for the same reason."

STORY LEITH HILLARD

# DMOs respond to heatwave

District mechanical officers (DMOs) around the state worked for 1,020 hours in the week of the January heatwave.

A DMO van travelled to Laharum before moving to Halls Gap; a crew from Geelong went to Yaapeet; Wangaratta DMOs went to Tallangatta South; Cranbourne travelled to Seymour and to support Moe DMOs at Westbury; Warrnambool went to Stawell; and Bairnsdale attended Glenaladale in East Gippsland. DMO vans and crews were also sent to Loxton in South Australia and Holbrook in New South Wales.

Brendan Collier, the Officer in Charge (OIC) at Mt Evelyn workshop and currently seconded to work out of CFA headquarters, was on call all week.

"The trucks have been performing really well," Brendan said. "Minor damage is part and parcel of firefighting operations, but that's really all we've been looking at. It's been a mix of vehicles working operationally across the state, though East Gippsland has seen mostly slip-ons and ultralights in service. "It just went like clockwork. All the preparations were the right ones. We like to get the job done quietly and make sure everybody's looked after."

One day before the fire weather spike day, preparations were underway at Warrnambool DMO workshop with all staff rostered on. OIC Pat Hyland tuned in for the teleconference of all OICs around the state.

"We try to be at full strength on a TFB [Total Fire Ban]," said Pat. "We're a mobilised fleet which can support operations 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Technology and logistics are our two greatest challenges but we're meeting those challenges."

STORY LEITH HILLARD



# Fires burn into communities



**Above:**  
Fire at Hazelwood mine

**Above right:**  
Caroline Springs pumper crew protects a house in Mickleham

**Bottom right:**  
Testing firefighters for carbon monoxide levels

PHOTOS: KEITH PAKENHAM

**Strong winds and high temperatures on 9 February led to 78 separate fires and almost 150 Emergency Warnings were issued, including evacuation advice, for several communities.**

## MINE FIRES

A grassfire that started west of Morwell and spread into the Hazelwood open cut mine continued to burn in late February. The 426-hectare fire was estimated to run for three kilometres and is burning within non-working sections of the mine.

The firefight has involved around 200 CFA and MFB firefighters, 100 mine staff and 30 incident management team personnel working around the clock. They've been supported by approximately 80 tankers, heavy pumping vehicles, ground monitors, ladder platforms and other aerial trucks, water cannons and aircraft.

In the early days of the fire, the incident control centre was moved to Traralgon to a facility purpose built for multi-agency capability.

The main focus of the firefight has been the prevention of lateral fire spread in the coal batters. Firefighting tactics have included helicopter water bombing to reduce the heat at the coalface and support suppression activities. Unmanned spray systems were also put in place to reduce the use of firefighters at the coalface. Landslips occurred in the mine so the use of water was closely monitored.

A medical division was established for priority health management of personnel. Firefighters at the scene are required to wear air quality monitors and appropriate personal protective equipment due to the risk posed to them by carbon monoxide.

Nineteen firefighters attended hospital because they were ill or because they wanted to be tested for carbon monoxide in the early days of the fire.

"Our firefighters are being properly tested on arrival and when leaving the mine," said Deputy Regional Controller Andrew Zammit in mid-February. "They can't leave the site until health monitoring has been completed and this is maintained under a 'no health tag, no exit' policy.

"Firefighters and mine staff are required to leave the mine every two hours for a break and carbon monoxide levels are regularly checked using air quality monitors. Some firefighters are also required to wear breathing apparatus while fighting the fire."

The 9 February grassfire also spread into non-working sections of the Yallourn open cut mine. The fire was estimated to be 2.5 kilometres long. An Air-Crane was being used to suppress 30 hectares of fire on the mine floor, with fire crews once again working around the clock.

Vital additional support at both mine fires has been provided by a broad range of agencies including Ambulance Victoria, SES, Victoria Police, Department of Human Services, Environment Protection Agency, Red Cross and interstate fire agencies.

## MICKLEHAM-KILMORE FIRE

A fast-moving grassfire started on the outskirts of Craigieburn on 9 February. The communities of Beveridge, Bylands, Chintin, Darraweit Guim, Donnybrook, Forbes, High Camp, Kalkallo, Kilmore, Mickleham, Moranding, Wallan and Willowmavin were impacted, and other nearby communities were put on high alert. The fire was contained on 13 February and declared under control 24 hours later.

The 22,880-hectare fire had a perimeter of 210 kilometres. A total of 96 Emergency Warnings were issued and 18 houses destroyed.

At the height of the fire, there were about 810 firefighters from Tullamarine airport, CFA, Department of Environment and Primary Industries, MFB, NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) and Fire and Rescue NSW, 15 aircraft, numerous plant and machinery, support personnel and private firefighting units.

Phil Hawkey, one of the incident controllers, described the early firefight as guerilla warfare. "It was a house-to-house, street-to-street battle with a fire approaching numerous communities. It was moving at about seven kilometres an hour with a flame height of about eight metres, exhibiting erratic fire behaviour and reaching some difficult terrain.

"It was also very complex from an emergency management point of view. It crossed three CFA districts and regions; two catchment management authorities; three electricity providers and three local government boundaries. There were also 56 police officers on traffic management points, so there was a cast of thousands.

"We were thinking about recovery from the word go. I had five deputy incident controllers, each with a different focus: one, recovery; two, the functionality of the incident management team; three, warnings, advice and the media; four, traffic management and evacuation; and five, working back to the emergency management team.

"The support from other agencies was outstanding and the messaging was also a vital part of the success. Warnings were tailored and put out in a timely manner and the community listened and, in the main, got out early. There were 1,240 houses in the footprint of the fire and 13,000 people in the path of the fire. It's always devastating when houses are lost, but the work of crews on the ground was excellent and we brought all our troops home safely."

Unsurprisingly, Kilmore brigade Captain David Williams seconded that praise and acknowledgement.

"We had massive support from the shire as well as private units and earthmoving contractors," said David, "and the local ladies did a fantastic job feeding the troops.

"This fire came to Kilmore on the west side of the Northern Highway south of Kilmore. With a bit of luck and hard work it skirted Kilmore, but then it came back. The eastern flank crept back up the hills towards the rural/urban interface on a southerly which is unusual.

"The fortunate thing for us is that we have a number of ex-captains in the brigade which means strategic minds in the brigade management team. We'd been edgy about the western side of town before summer and ran a number of training scenarios in that response zone. We got a lot of new members after Black Saturday and for them the training exercises came to the fore when the fire came in. Now the new recruits are blooded and a lot of people are coming to us and saying thanks."

Wallan brigade Captain Ken Castle is receiving both handshakes and numerous local fundraising offers in the wake of the fire.

"On Sunday, residents were watching the fire on our boundary and it seemed like it missed us, but on Monday we got the second wave on a southerly," said Ken. "It hit Springfield Gorge and tore up the hill and we fought it all afternoon."

Unfortunately, eight houses were lost in Wallan and Wallan Heights but when Ken took the Premier on a tour of the area he saw householders supporting each other and heard of their gratitude for the brigade.



"We had a family day after the fire," said Ken, "and I broke down because I was so proud of how everyone stuck together and supported each other including MFB, New South Wales RFS and aviation fire services.

"I couldn't even get people to go home when the fire was running. We were fed by the community. There are always issues and there was animosity about the roadblocks, but they were necessary and this has been a real bonding thing."

Phil Hawkey's day job is a CFA vegetation management officer.

"The entire fireground was on private land so we've now got a massive task in front of us," he said. "There are 600 properties with damaged fences and control line construction to be rehabilitated.

"It was a nasty fire but we had a great team and everyone can feel justifiably proud of all they achieved. The fact that there was no loss of life or serious injury is a fantastic outcome."

## EAST GIPPSLAND FIRES

As the significant fire conditions of 9 February dawned, there were already 18 fires active in far East Gippsland between the Snowy River and the NSW border. The largest were burning in the Snowy River National Park and the Errinundra National Park and nearby state forest areas.

A multi-agency taskforce of firefighters, led by the Department of Environment and Primary Industries and supported by CFA, has also included troops from interstate and New Zealand building and strengthening control lines or mineral earth breaks.

By 20 February, three significant fires were not yet under control: Goongerah-Deddick Trail (137,500 hectares), Club Terrace Cluster (8,100) and Timbarra-Gil Groggin (2,000).

The Goongerah-Deddick Trail fire (see story on page 7) has a perimeter of 685 kilometres, while the Club Terrace-Goolengook River fire has a perimeter of 88 kilometres. At least 12 houses have been destroyed in the Snowy River complex.

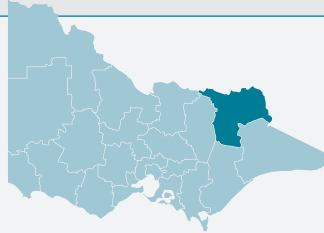
Major community challenges in these long-duration fires have included road access for food, water, fodder and stock movements, and people not heeding warnings because, frankly, they were sick of them.

STORY LEITH HILLARD



## Six-hour gorge rescue

**INCIDENT:** High-angle rescue  
**DISTRICT:** 24  
**DATE:** 30 December 2013  
**BRIGADES:** Beechworth Urban, Beechworth Rural, Mount Beauty, Stanley, Wodonga, Wodonga West



A visit to Beechworth Gorge proved to be life changing for a father and his son who, following an accident, had to be lifted during a six-hour high-angle rescue.

When Beechworth Rural Fire Brigade Captain Keith Harms arrived at the scene, he set up a control point and arranged for the tourist road to be blocked. It wasn't long before SES, Ambulance Victoria and police arrived at the scene.

Despite falling a remarkable and frightening distance and suffering suspected broken bones and fractures, the father and son were still conscious, but around 200 metres from the waiting ambulances. The granite rock gorge is characterised by huge boulders, steep drop-offs and a variety of bush and vegetation, and this meant the rescuers had to make very cautious descents and ascents on foot to reach the patients.

It was decided that an air lift with winch was the most practical option, but this wasn't possible because of unstable weather conditions for the helicopter.



PHOTO: DON MASON

While members of the Mount Beauty high-angle rescue squad put their agreed plans into action, a page was put out to the local brigade to assist with the hauling of gear and ropes. When both patients had been stabilised by paramedics, more than 50 people took part in hauling up the father and son by roped stretcher.

"Rescues of this magnitude don't happen all that often," said Mount Beauty brigade's Lieutenant Don Mason, "but it was brilliant the way everything we've practised came together, with each of the emergency teams combining and committed to the task."

This was a huge task in a difficult and challenging situation and all the rescuers should be proud of a job well done.

STORY DAVID BOX

## Drama in Dromana

**INCIDENT:** Grass and scrub fire  
**DISTRICT:** 8  
**DATE:** 14 January 2014  
**BRIGADES:** Dromana, Frankston, Mount Martha, Rosebud, Dandenong, Red Hill, Shoreham, Boneo, Main Ridge, Mornington, Balnarring, Flinders

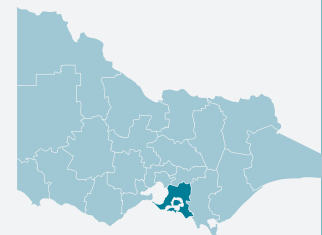


PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

**Brigades responded quickly to reports of a fire on the Mornington Peninsula Freeway near Arthurs Seat in mid-January.**

Following multiple triple zero calls about a fire along the median strip near Lonsdale Street, all units responded Code 1 (lights and sirens) and 10 tankers were requested to attend.

With strong winds blowing, the fire quickly jumped the road and burnt through the tea trees and other native bushes, travelled up the embankment and started ember attacks on nearby homes.

The thatched-roof cafe in the grounds of historic 19th century homestead Heronswood House came under heavy ember attack. Unfortunately, it couldn't be saved but the homestead was protected by crews and wasn't damaged. Many other homes in the area survived because of firefighters' hard work.

A helicopter helped with the firefight, and it had a major impact on slowing down the fire along the freeway and protecting Heronswood House. Parks Victoria also supported CFA crews, with six slip-ons and around 15 personnel.

Water pressure was a problem high up the mountain, so several booster pumps were set up to supply trucks with pressure.

"Getting to the scene was hampered because of tourist traffic and residents leaving, but the firefighters did a fantastic job," said Operations Officer and Officer in Charge John Francis. "It was a hot, windy day and although one building was lost, we could have lost a lot more."

Several firefighters suffered from the effects of smoke and heat and were treated by Ambulance Victoria paramedics on site. Also, Dandenong brigade's rehabilitation module helped to rehydrate crews at the scene. Narre Warren catering unit attended late in the day to feed the hungry members.

The power company was called as power lines burnt through and dropped on to nearby roads where crews were working.

STORY KEITH PAKENHAM

# HEROIC CONFINED SPACE RESCUE

**INCIDENT:** Confined space rescue  
**DISTRICT:** 9  
**DATE:** 27 November 2013  
**BRIGADES:** Traralgon, Darnum-Ellinbank, Morwell, Warragul, Yarragon



**By the time Russell Gaul arrived at the scene with two others in the Darnum-Ellinbank tanker, a desperate rescue was underway with a serious risk of four fatalities.**

At a dairy farm near Warragul, a farmer had been attending to the bad smell coming from a tank containing corn starch. The product had to be sent to the manure pond where it would be diluted and pumped on to paddocks as liquid fertiliser.

He climbed into the tank and was quickly overcome by fumes. It was a hot day and the corn starch was fermenting and producing carbon dioxide. The farmer's family saw him try to climb out before his head disappeared. One son climbed in the tank and was overcome; a second son climbed in and was also overcome. A farm worker cut a hole in the side of the tank before entering the tank, but he was also overcome.

The farmer's wife called triple zero. Fortunately, two police officers were only a minute away. They were confronted by four people apparently lifeless, face up in the slurry.

"There were a few police and MICA [mobile intensive care ambulance] paramedics already on scene and they were just getting the last one out of the tank when we arrived," said Russell Gaul.

In fact, the first two responding police officers had just done something far above and beyond their duty. With no breathing apparatus available and understanding that the situation was desperate, one police officer went into the tank to drag out the victims while the other held on to his belt.

"If they hadn't gone in, we would've had four deaths," continued Russell. "They put their lives on the line and did what they thought had to be done. I take my hat off to them."

"The police were running the show and I took on a command role with SES. The lead police officer was under pressure but he was doing an amazing job. We worked with SES and

ambos to get the patients stabilised and on to stretchers. They were put in a coma.

"Within half an hour to three-quarters of an hour, three air ambulances were on scene. Because the patients were covered in corn syrup, we couldn't put them in the confined space of the air ambulances and risk the fumes rising again. So under the guidance of the ambo we gently washed them down using water from our tanker."

The men were taken to hospital in a stable but critical condition. The two police officers were also taken to hospital.

Operations Officer Bill Alards was CFA liaison at the scene. "Early on, the lead ambo, lead police officer and myself got together as an emergency management team to discuss what each agency was doing and what needed to be done," said Bill. "There was constant communication. Everyone was on the same page."

Warragul brigade hazmat took readings from around the scene and in the tank and reported to the state's rostered scientific officer.

"I have nothing but praise for the police officers," said Bill. "The ambo was clear that we had been minutes away from multiple fatalities and the police acted on that urgency. They were damned if they did, from an occupational health and safety perspective, but they were damned if they didn't."

"We wouldn't recommend that anyone enter a confined space without breathing apparatus but, in this case, it was fortunate the police acted as they did. It was that close it wasn't funny."

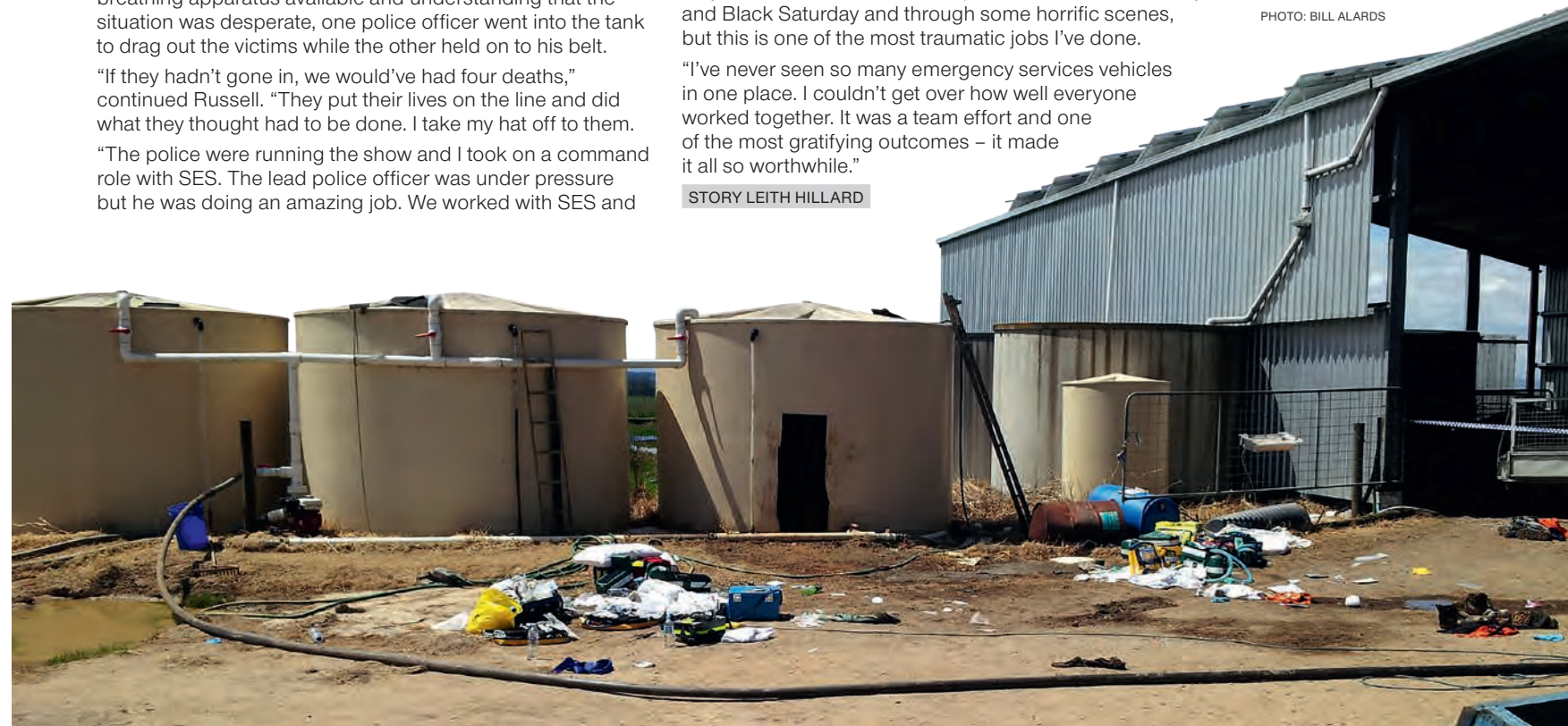
A few weeks later, all four patients were discharged from hospital and the farmer and his wife visited Russell to say thanks. "He put his arm around me..." said Russell, struggling to describe the visit as his emotions welled up. "I've lived here for 61 years and know the family. They've farmed in the district for generations. I've been in CFA for 42 years and I've been to the alpine fires, Ash Wednesday and Black Saturday and through some horrific scenes, but this is one of the most traumatic jobs I've done."

"I've never seen so many emergency services vehicles in one place. I couldn't get over how well everyone worked together. It was a team effort and one of the most gratifying outcomes - it made it all so worthwhile."

STORY LEITH HILLARD

**Below:**  
The scene of the rescue

PHOTO: BILL ALARDS



# AUSTRALIA DAY 2014 HONOURS

The Australia Day Honours, announced by the Governor-General, provide national and formal recognition for more than 900 Australians who have made a significant difference to their communities. Congratulations to the five CFA members who received the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) and the three who received the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM).

## MEDAL OF THE ORDER OF AUSTRALIA

### LEON WILLIAMS

Looking back over his 55 years with Mooroopna brigade, and more than 43 years as secretary, Leon said his greatest achievement was successfully lobbying for better resources for Mooroopna, including two substantial upgrades to the fire station. In 2007, Leon was honoured with an Australian Fire Service Medal to recognise his contribution to keeping the Mooroopna community safe.

### IAN BODINNAR

Ian was awarded the OAM for service to the community of Nyah West, where he's lived almost all of his life. Ian joined CFA in 1955 and is now a life member of the wider organisation and Nyah West brigade. He also spent around 30 years in the Swan Hill Gliding Club where he served as president for 15 years, has been a Justice of the Peace since 1975, and is on the local hospital committee.

### JOHN McEVOY

Since moving to the area 32 years ago, John has seen many changes at the Dederang brigade. Right now, he's assisting the brigade with the digital radio changeover. John's career as a teacher and leader in the Catholic school system, where he worked for 35 years, were important factors in his nomination for Australia Day Honours.

## NORM BODINNAR

Like his brother Ian, Norm Boddinar has been an active member of Nyah West brigade for more than 50 years. During his time as a volunteer firefighter, Norm has attended major campaign fires including the Ash Wednesday and Sydney fires, and was captain of the brigade for 29 years. Norm has seen many changes during his time at CFA, most notably a range of improvements that have made it safer for firefighters to respond to incidents.

## ALAN ELEY

Alan has been volunteering at Echuca brigade literally his whole life. The 84-year-old was born at the fire station house in 1929, where his father worked as the resident officer, and it wasn't long before Alan was following in his father's footsteps. For the past 70 years, Alan has dedicated his life to keeping the close-knit community safe in his role as a fire investigator.

## AUSTRALIAN FIRE SERVICE MEDAL

### DAVID GERRARD

David has been a member of Beaufort brigade for more than 40 years. Captain of the brigade for 22 years and currently deputy group officer for Beaufort Group, David is a farmer. Community safety and education is a major focus of the brigade, and David has led a program of community engagement for more than two decades.



## ANDREW O'CONNELL

Andrew's distinguished career as a firefighter began when he was 15 years old after he signed up as a volunteer at CFA's Hurstbridge brigade. The 44-year-old has since dedicated his life to firefighting – when he's not working at the MFB as an operations commander, he volunteers at Hurstbridge brigade. Over the past 30 years, Andrew has been responsible for developing and commissioning innovative firefighting appliances.

## PETER SCHMIDT

Peter's CFA career spans 41 years. He started as a volunteer firefighter with Bunyip brigade and is now the Southern Metropolitan Region director. While volunteering for CFA, he undertook several senior roles including deputy group officer for Pakenham Group and was also an instructor at Fiskville from the early 80s to the early 90s. He recently joined Sorrento brigade and is looking forward to jumping on a truck again.

## Keeping trucks going

A new fire appliance fleet management policy lays out how reallocation and refurbishment will extend the life of CFA-owned trucks.

"Age alone is not a reason to retire a truck," said Manager of Fleet Performance Tim Smith. "We have 25-year-old trucks still carrying out the tasks they are intended for."

An example is Samaria Rural Fire Brigade's 1990 Hino 'Herbie' (pictured) kept in as-new condition.

"We will refurbish older trucks, upgrading the warning light systems, for example," continued Tim.

"Reallocation will take into account the change in risk profiles of urban fringe brigades. A truck at a busy station doing 20,000 kilometres a year working at its limit may be exchanged with a truck that only does 5,000 kilometres a year.

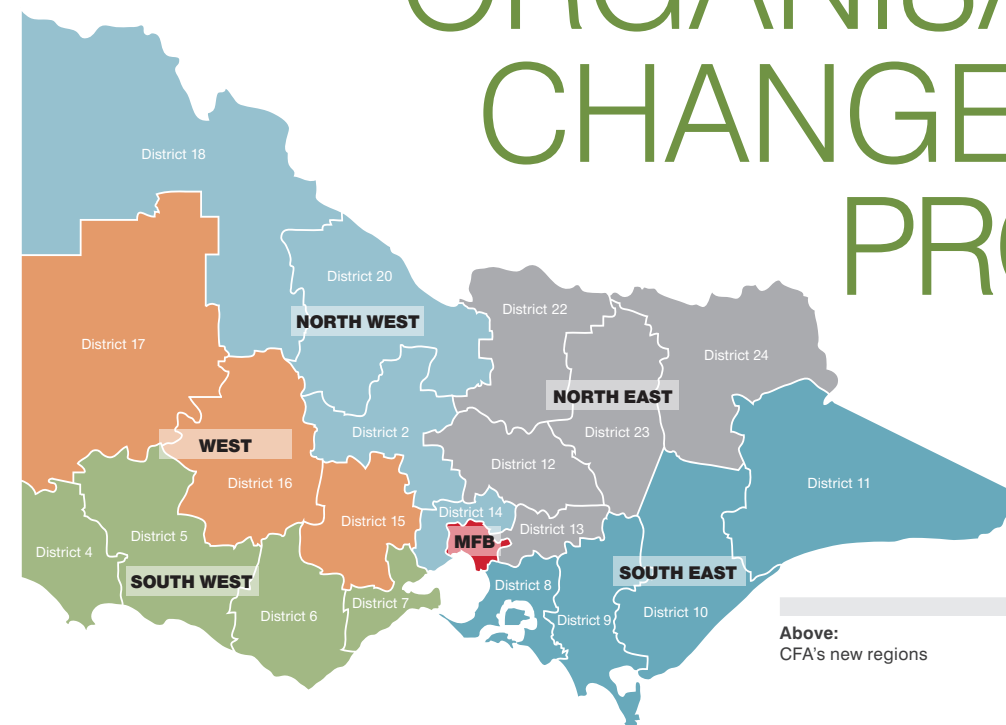
"The aim is for all trucks to end their life in the same condition, having done the same amount of work."

STORY LEITH HILLARD



PHOTO: BARRY O'CONNOR

# ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE MAKES PROGRESS



Last year, CFA's Executive Leadership Team and other leaders travelled to all parts of Victoria to get members' thoughts on proposed actions to make sure CFA has the most effective support in place to help members deliver services.

As a result, we received a lot of feedback about the changes, which can ultimately help us to respond better to the increasing threats and challenges to our communities.

"The emergency services and emergency management sectors are continually changing and adapting. CFA is a fantastic organisation with a long and proud history, and we will keep pace and not be left behind," said CFA Chief Executive Officer Mick Bourke.

"Just because we've operated in a certain way in the past doesn't necessarily mean this is the best way to do things into the future. We continue to look at ourselves and ask 'can we do it better?'"

After all feedback and discussions were taken on board, the changes, under the Creating Our Future Together program, have been confirmed. Over the course of 2014, the number of CFA regions will be consolidated from eight to five with no changes to districts – see the map, above. We believe this will help share the workload and risk (for example, operational incidents and growth corridors) fairly among regions and create a common appreciation of the challenges, culture and good practice across our metro, provincial and rural areas.

Support services, such as People and Culture and Finance, will be centrally coordinated and managed (with most resources remaining in the field), and the service delivery model will shift so the focus is at district and brigade levels.

Despite the escalated challenges CFA faced over summer, these changes are now progressing with directorates across our organisation starting to review how they operate and deliver their work to best support the new model. Plans are in place for all organisational designs and structures to be developed and advanced, and we are aiming for assistant chief officers to be in place in each region by 30 June 2014. Planning for regional consolidation has commenced.

The consultation period held from July to September last year won't be the last chance for members to be involved and have their say as we transition to these new arrangements.

"One of the most important things for us as we move to implementing this model is that we continue to update, involve and allow members to provide feedback at every opportunity," said Mick.

"We believe the consultation allowed the right decisions to be made for us to set about changing the way we do business; to become a more modern and sustainable organisation, helping us to continue to perform and deliver what our communities require year after year."

STORY CAITLIN STONEHOUSE

## What will change in 2014?

- CFA will be moving from eight regions to five. There will be no change to district boundaries. Barwon South West and Grampians regions will remain the same, while Loddon Mallee and Northern and Western Metropolitan; Hume and Eastern Metropolitan; and Gippsland and Southern Metropolitan will be consolidated. The five new regions will have new names.
- Assistant chief officers (ACOs) will be appointed as the regional leaders, with a prime focus on planning and coordinating the delivery of Fire and Emergency Management (F&EM) services through districts.
- Brigades and districts will have greater opportunity to lead service delivery, and groups and districts will support brigades.
- Support services, such as People and Culture (human resources), Asset Maintenance, Finance, and Training and Development, will be centrally coordinated and managed. CFA staff will still be located in the field in order to build local knowledge, maintain relationships and provide services face-to-face.
- There will be central coordination of fire safety functions within F&EM, which will support consistency in services and enable the deployment of resources by workload on a statewide basis. Staff performing these functions can also be located in the field.

## CHIEF OFFICER

Euan Ferguson [www.cfa.vic.gov.au/chiefblog](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/chiefblog)

## OUTSTANDING EFFORT AT MORWELL

Sunday 9 February was predicted to be a bad day and it proved to be the most significant fire activity day since 2009. Hot and windy conditions over the eastern two-thirds of the state caused new fire starts on Melbourne's urban fringes and increased fire spread in Gippsland. Since 8 February, 45 houses have been confirmed destroyed across Victoria, and many more damaged. Also, a substantial loss of livestock, fencing and pasture has exacerbated the farming impact of the fires. These losses are on top of the 32 houses destroyed in the Grampians in mid-January.

All reports and evidence to date support that interoperability, processes, systems, warnings and public information and command and control arrangements worked well. This means there has been a marked improvement in the way agencies service communities and that the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission recommendations have been both actioned and embedded.

In the context of history, the 2013-14 season is consistent with Victoria's worst grassfire seasons. At the time of writing, four fires of significance are not yet under control. Damaging fires in the west and central areas of the state still also remain a possibility. Individuals in at-risk areas need to continue to be prepared, vigilant to changing conditions, heed advice and act on warnings.

One of the fires that started on 9 February was near Morwell, which impacted a range of infrastructure including the Hazelwood and Yallourn power stations. Both are brown coal-fuelled base-load power stations. Fire remains in the area around Morwell, including in a disused section of the Hazelwood open cut mine. Levels of smoke in and around the Latrobe Valley vary depending on the weather. The Morwell area is feeling the most serious effects when there are light south-westerly winds or no winds to disperse the smoke. Air quality is being monitored by the Environment Protection Authority, emergency services and hazmat technicians. Fine particles and carbon monoxide are measured to indicate the impact of smoke on local air quality. Smoke haze in the valley is expected to continue for some time.

The safety of our people is a fundamental statutory obligation that governs the way we operate. Therefore, a stringent health

monitoring process overseen by health professionals is in place and will be for the duration of the incident. On arrival, during shifts and at shift completion, all emergency services personnel must go through the health monitoring process. Personnel must also be aware of the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning and present for treatment immediately if they develop symptoms. Monitoring will continue over the coming weeks to minimise any risks to communities and firefighters. A range of strategies has been developed to manage the health, safety and welfare of all personnel on site and the health of the local communities, as well as ensuring consistent, tailored and specific messaging.

I sincerely thank everyone that has been involved for their outstanding effort, the substantial commitment of many people over many days, in what continue to be challenging circumstances. Our strategies and processes will continue to be revisited and refined to ensure the best possible outcome. The collaborative approach and support from partner agencies remains invaluable.

As well as the CFA website, information about the Morwell mine fire hazmat incident is available from: [health.vic.gov.au](http://health.vic.gov.au), [epa.vic.gov.au](http://epa.vic.gov.au) and [recovery.vic.gov.au](http://recovery.vic.gov.au).



## Take part in the training strategy survey

Following the release of CFA's new Fire and Emergency Management training strategy last year, Operational Training and Volunteerism (OT&V) has been working on a range of actions and developing a baseline for measuring progress against the strategy.

One tool for measuring progress is the training strategy baseline survey. Executive Director of OT&V Lex de Man said, "This survey is an important step in the next stage of implementation of the training strategy to ensure the future of our training is focused and we have consistent standards for the relevant risks that our members need to train for.

"I'm seeking five minutes input from everyone into the next stage of the Fire and Emergency Management training strategy by completing

this survey," Lex said. Supported by other data analyses, the survey results will be used to set a performance baseline and targets against the agreed strategy outcomes.

You can complete the survey by going to Brigades Online > Training > Strategy > F&EM Training Strategy. The survey closes on 15 April.

Meanwhile, current work on the training strategy includes developing the All Hazards and Bushfire Skills training programs to replace the current Minimum Skills; redesigning the Brigade Operating Skills Profile (BOSP) tool to make it more relevant and easier to use; and developing a skills map to make it easier to plan volunteer skill development.

STORY JAMES STITZ

## New digital listening sets

Providing members with digital listening sets is a priority for CFA and the Regional Radio Dispatch Service (RRDS) project, as members transition to the new digital radio dispatch network. Work is well underway to identify a new listening set capable of receiving analogue and digital radio traffic.

For CFA members, a listening set may improve their situational awareness and also prepare them for possible deployment.

Being a long-standing member, Bob Kennedy understands its significance. "I've had a listening set for 25 years and it's a really important source of information," Bob said. "While it's there in the background all the time, the brain really clicks in when you hear something that's coming your way or something that affects your area."

Bob, who's the RRDS Regional Coordinator for Hume, said that many members in his region rely on their

listening sets to keep in touch with what's happening with fire and incidents not only in their immediate area, but also in neighbouring districts.

"For members, this is important information, especially during the fire season," said Bob.

CFA recognises that, as well as CFA members, members of the wider public also use listening sets to monitor radio traffic of fires and other incidents in their area.

Expressions of interest for the supply of new listening sets were sought in January. The RRDS project team is now in the process of evaluating submissions from interested suppliers and will consult with Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria before a final recommendation is made.

If you want to know more, contact the project team on 9262 8277 or email [rrds@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:rrds@cfa.vic.gov.au).

STORY AMY CHEMAY

### leadership

Begin succession planning when everything's going well – a plan must be in place before it's needed

## Time to think about smoke alarms

Despite widespread use of smoke alarms, many homes fall short of Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) recommendations when it comes to maintaining them.

Only one in three households with a single smoke alarm test it properly by pressing the button until the siren sounds. Even fewer (5 per cent) test it monthly.

On Sunday 6 April, fire services will again be reminding all Victorians to change their smoke alarm batteries when they change their clocks to mark the end of daylight saving.

Last year in Victoria, there were more than 3,500 house fires. Smoke alarms are an essential early warning and give you time to evacuate safely – but only if they work.

As part of this year's CFA, MFB and Duracell batteries campaign, you'll be seeing a lot of online advertising supported in regional areas by TV and newspaper ads, and hearing radio commercials. You may also see other messaging on battery displays in major retailers. To target a wider audience, we'll also be ramping up our messaging across social media and other digital media channels this year.

Brigades will also be able to chat with their community through any local arrangements they may have with stores such as Bunnings or other local businesses. When daylight saving comes to an end, remind your communities that without working smoke alarms you're four times more likely to die in a house fire.

This is all part of the national Smoke Alarm Campaign, a coordinated campaign by nine fire services across seven states and territories.

It's important for CFA members to set a good example for their community by taking action themselves to protect their families and homes from fire. CFA and MFB recommend you:

- locate smoke alarms in the right places around your home – that is, between each bedroom area and the rest of the house, in each bedroom where someone sleeps with the door shut, and on each storey of a multi-storey home
- test your smoke alarms monthly by pressing the test button with a broom handle
- replace your batteries each year and at the same time vacuum around the smoke alarm vents
- replace your smoke alarms every 10 years.



For more information about smoke alarms and fire escape plans, go to [cfa.vic.gov.au](http://cfa.vic.gov.au). If you want to know more about the Smoke Alarm Campaign, contact your regional office.

STORY KAYLA MASKELL



## FEATURE

# WHEN INCIDENT CONTROL CENTRES FIRE UP

What happens when an incident turns into a major threat and the incident controller (IC) needs help? We look at the transfer of control and how it escalates when the IC in the field, in consultation with others, thinks it's time to shift the location of incident control to help manage a growing incident.

All fires and incidents have an IC who begins managing the incident at the fireground (Level 1). But this may be elevated to a Level 2 incident at an incident control centre (ICC), or even straight from Level 1 to Level 3 (also at an ICC) depending on the potential of the incident to become a major fire resulting in significant impacts, including loss of life or community assets.

While an incident is at Level 1 and 2, the IC works within the 'business as usual' chain of command within the IC's agency. The 'line of control' (incident/regional/state) exists at all times and is activated when a bushfire is elevated to Level 3.

## HOW IS CONTROL TRANSFERRED TO AN ICC?

As the bushfire starts to grow and the level of risk and likely consequences increase, the regional controller and state controller monitor the potential of the bushfire. They may maintain contact with the IC and agency commanders, and may start to become actively involved when there's the potential of a major threat from the bushfire.

The regional controller will also discuss transfer of control with the rostered duty officer (RDO) and usually with the IC as well, to get a complete understanding of the situation. This discussion can be initiated by the IC or regional controller.

A smooth, efficient and timely transfer of control is essential and requires active and comprehensive discussion and communication of the change in management structure.

The on-ground IC and the RDO consult on a range of triggers that may drive the need to transfer control from the field location to an ICC. These triggers include:

- the need to issue Warnings and Advice to the community
- complexity of resource management aspects across the fireground, including aircraft and multi-agency requirements
- the production of fire prediction mapping

- implementation of health and safety systems
- the potential for the fire to escalate quickly and impact on people or community assets
- the potential for evacuation
- other factors relevant at the time or likely to become relevant for the fire or incident.

The RDO then begins the process of transferring control to a pre-appointed IC who may already have an incident management team (IMT) in place at the ICC during the fire season.

The IMT begins to operate within a designated multi-agency ICC. There are 40 ICCs in Victoria. During periods of high fire risk, ICCs are opened with IMTs pre-arranged and ICs identified and ready to lead an IMT that will expand as the bushfire risk increases.

If the bushfire is growing to a point where it needs an escalation of management to support field operations, the decision to activate a Level 3 IMT is made in consultation between CFA regional commanders and Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI).

The IC, in consultation with the IMT and the emergency management team (EMT) continues to develop and implement an overall incident response in line with the state controller's strategic control plan.

EMTs are a vital component of the control arrangements. They are a collaborative forum where agencies with a diverse range of responsibilities identify and discuss the risks and likely consequences of the emergency. This allows the IC to determine plans based on a broad multi-agency and cross-organisational approach.

EMTs are usually formed by the IC when more than one agency is involved in the response. They can be formed at incident, regional or state level, and bring a team approach to incident management whether at the fireground level or in a formalised control centre such as an ICC or the State Control Centre (SCC).

With protecting lives the most important factor, the IC, IMT and EMT quickly assess the safety of firefighters on the fireground and the potential risks and likely consequences to local fire-affected communities.

When control is transferred from the fireground to an ICC, the incident may be divided into sectors and divisions. Sector commanders report to the divisional commander. Sector

PHOTO: KEITH PANENHAM



commanders implement their portion of the incident action plan and the management and allocation of resources within their sector.

The division provides operational leadership and 'span of control' over a functional or geographic area of an incident. The division commander manages operations from a forward location and reports directly to the operations officer in the IMT, who in turn reports to the IC.

## PROCEDURES AND LEGISLATION

The Fire Services Commissioner (FSC) has issued the *State Command and Control Arrangements for Bushfire in Victoria 2013* under Section 21 of the *Fire Services Commissioner Act 2010* and in accordance with the approach outlined in the *Emergency Management Act 1986*. These describe the command and control arrangements for bushfire readiness and response in Victoria.

The document contains information that is additional to the arrangements in the *State Emergency Response Plan (Part 3 of the Emergency Management Manual Victoria)*. EMMV uses a three-tiered approach for emergency management: incident, regional and state. It clarifies who is accountable and the process for escalating control of a bushfire from the incident level to incorporate the regional and state tiers of control.

## WHO'S IN AN IMT STRUCTURE?

The structure of IMTs is based on the Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System (AIIMS). AIIMS is used to manage actions on the fireground and resolve the incident. It starts when the first team arrives on site and scales up or down as necessary. It brings together personnel, procedures, facilities, equipment and communications into a common organisational structure.

The IMT provides various management functions for the control, planning, public information, operations and logistics during a bushfire.

The IC has overall responsibility for managing all activities to resolve the incident and assigns and delegates functions and tasks to various members of the IMT. The IC is also responsible for incident action planning, risk management, the flow of operational information, communications plans, intelligence (including weather conditions on the fireground) and Warnings and Advice to local communities.

One of the key functions of the IC is to ensure the effective management and coordination of firefighting resources such as strike teams and aircraft. This includes requests for, or movement of, resources at the regional and state levels.

A Level 3 IMT also includes:

- Operations Section: strike teams, aircraft, plant, division and sector control
- Planning Section: Intelligence, Situation, Resources, Communications

- Public Information Section: Warnings and Advice, Media Management, Community Liaison
- Logistics Section: logistics, supply, facilities, ground support, medical services, catering, finance.

## DO YOU WANT TRAINING?

Incidents often involve many people working in a rapidly-changing situation and have the potential to significantly impact communities. To manage these events, our incident managers need to be well trained, experienced, able to gain feedback on their performance and learn from others. The Incident Management Team Training Project (IMTTP) aims to improve the capability of incident management personnel in Victoria.

The project develops common training packages, leadership and exercising frameworks, robust accreditation programs, coaching and mentoring programs and experience-based learning tools.

It works closely with CFA, DEPI, MFB, State Emergency Service and the Fire Services Commissioner's office to train people to work on multi-agency incidents and a range of hazards. Since 2010, the project has worked with its partner agencies to train over 4,600 personnel.

Much of the project is focused on ensuring that all Victoria's emergency services agencies train their Level 2 and Level 3 incident management personnel to the same standard. In addition, an accreditation pathway is being introduced

across the agencies. This pathway will see personnel nominated to key Level 2 and all Level 3 roles, and follow a rigorous process to develop and confirm their knowledge, skills and experience for the role. In CFA, this has already been introduced for Level 3 incident controllers, with 57 accredited to date.

The Incident Leadership Framework has been developed, setting a common standard for leadership development for incident management personnel. In line with this, the project has led the delivery of Fireline Leadership, Incident Leadership and Organisational Leadership since 2012. More than 670 personnel have participated in leadership courses in this time.

The project is also developing programs to help people gain experience and exposure to the incident management environment more rapidly, learn from others and learn from previous incidents. These programs include computer simulation, coaching and mentoring and field-based case studies (also called staff rides). In 2013, 935 people participated in IMTTP computer simulation program activities.

If you think you'd make a good incident manager, or are interested in performing an IMT role, contact your group officer or operations manager.

For more information about IMTTP, go to [Brigades Online](#) and search for IMTTP, or contact Georgy Wood on 8822 8043.

STORY DARREN GREVIS-JAMES AND GEORGY WOOD

# MY ICC EXPERIENCE

STORY LEITH HILLARD

## LOGISTICS OFFICER MALCOLM BISHOP



The chairman of Warrnambool brigade has been a volunteer for 37 years and in the Logistics role for 10 years. This year, Malcolm has been deployed for 10 days. "Once a fire is going, we set up the staging area, arrange transport, accommodation and food," he explained. "We rely on numbers

but they might be wrong, which can mean there's not enough food or there's too much. Pre-planning is done to find out the availability of caterers, but still the biggest challenge is finding someone to feed a lot of people with not much notice.

"The biggest improvement has been better communication. That means we now have the ability to improve things while they're happening – to work out a fix on the run rather than find out about a problem after the event."

## SITUATION OFFICER BRUCE HOLCOMBE



This Port Fairy brigade first lieutenant enjoys the wide-angle view of the Situation role. "We look at what's been happening, what is happening and what we want to happen," said Bruce. "We're the mystic, looking into the past, the present and the future. "I pass information to the Planning

officer. We come together with Resources and Mapping to put a plan together and put it to the incident controller. The major challenge is getting up-to-date information from the field. We need to know specifics like has a fire crossed a particular road. That has improved so much in the past 10 years with ground observers now reporting back. Their view from the field is gold for us in Situation.

"The highlight of any season is when the situation we've planned for and predicted reflects the information coming in."

## PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER SHARON LINKE



Sharon puts her day job as a CFA community education coordinator on hold to deploy into ICCs.

"Informing the public happens before, during and after an incident through issuing of warnings, working with the media or directly with the community," she said. "We facilitate meetings and see communities go through the range

of responses from subdued to angry. We need to personalise our response to meet their needs while making sure meetings don't get side-tracked by an individual's issues.

"A fire knows no rules and it's always a different community impacted. Small rural communities tend to be very engaged with CFA but other communities are totally disengaged.

"We often establish information points – it might be outside a post office or general store – where we have conversations and hand out community newsletters with tailored and relevant local information.

"The most satisfying part of the Public Information role is coming together and supporting each other as a team in partnership with other agencies and the community."

## SAFETY OFFICER DARYL LOVE



Daryl Love retired a year ago from life as a senior instructor and ex-officer in charge at Warrnambool Fire Station. He has worked as a Safety officer in ICCs for the past 10 years and is determined to keep his hand in.

"Today we have a strike team leaving for the Grampians," he said on a busy January day at

Warrnambool Incident Control Centre. "We need to ensure that the safety briefings are being maintained. They need to know what they're likely to confront when they get there, from fire behaviour to terrain and the weather. We get all that information from the incident action plan put together by Operations, Planning and Logistics.

"The other key safety messages to get across are about hydration and fatigue. We emphasise drinking water balanced with electrolytes, being aware of crew rotation on the back of tankers and rest when you can."

PHOTOS: LEITH HILLARD



PHOTO: JASON LEIGH

## Surgeons visit Fiskville

**World-leading trauma surgeons visited Fiskville late last year to get a feel for what firefighters experience on the front line when rescuing people.**

Surgeons from The Alfred Hospital and the Philippine General Hospital clutched on to the jackets of Fiskville recruits as they were led through a series of tunnels and doors during a simulated house fire.

"Today is about giving our guests an appreciation for the work the firefighters do, the environment they work in and how they deal with it," said Recruit Course Coordinator Chris Bigham.

The visit was initiated by Professor Mark Fitzgerald, Director of Trauma Services at The Alfred hospital and a previous patron of the recruit course.

"The Recruit Course Patrons Program is about bringing in inspiring people, whether they're successful in business or their personal lives, to give recruits guidance about meeting and overcoming challenges. It sets them up with some processes that will help in their recruit course and throughout their careers with CFA," said Chris.

Previous course patrons include Australian paralympic gold medal winner Carol Cooke, successful businessman Lindsay Fox, Channel Nine News presenter Peter Hitchener and University of Ballarat lecturer Sue Brown.

This was Mark's second visit in his role as course patron, and his presentation a month earlier was a real eye-opener said instructor Paul Fixter.

"It's good to get an understanding of the full chain of events, from the first responders to an emergency all the way up to the hospital care they get from the good staff at The Alfred emergency unit," said Paul. "While we work closely with the paramedics, we don't actually get to see or hear about the end result after we leave a motor vehicle accident or a bad medical situation."

Mark notices similarities between the work of his team and firefighters.

"Community service is very rewarding and fundamental to human nature. It's built into our frontal lobe – to feel good every time you help somebody else. I still get that feeling when I help people – it's great.

"Also, every job is different. It doesn't matter how much experience these people have fighting fires; there's something different and unexpected every time. It's the same working in injury management – there's always some variation because you're dealing with biological systems rather than engineered systems. They're unpredictable and challenging."

STORY JASON LEIGH

## CFA RESEARCH IS A WORLD FIRST

**Wangaratta and Ballarat residents saw smoke for several weeks in November and December but this time it was the result of cutting-edge research by CFA and CSIRO.**

In a world first, burns by local CFA volunteers took place on a large, private property to find out more about grassfires, grassland curing and how fire behaviour and risk is measured. CFA Research and Innovation Manager David Nichols said CFA does a lot of work around grassland curing, which looks at how and where grassland has dried out how this will contribute to fire danger.

"We're looking into the relationship between grassland curing and fire behaviour and to do this we need to perform a series of experimental burns on large areas of grassland," David said.

"We're hoping to find out the link between the rate of fire spread, flame geometry and fuel loads according to different grassland curing thresholds. This will not only help us with future response to grassfires, but will help determine what the Fire Danger Rating should be, when Fire Danger Periods should take place in a particular area, when to declare Total Fire Bans and how we allocate resources across the state."

"Testing has always focused on bushfires, but we need to look more closely at grassfires and the dangers involved.

"With help from CSIRO, we're now producing science behind what can actually happen during grassfires on all different types of grassland."

CFA also wants to dispel a range of myths about grassfires, including the perception that a fire won't travel far in grassland that's only 60 per cent cured.

CSIRO Bushfire Scientist Jim Gould is leading research into fire behaviour of various vegetation types throughout Australia, to develop tools and models to understand bushfire behaviour and protect lives and property.

"These experimental burns allow us to capture more thorough and improved data which, in turn, will contribute to more informed decisions when it comes to controlling grassfires and pre-empting their behaviour," Jim said.

To see more images and video go to [news.cfa.vic.gov.au/grassfire-research](http://news.cfa.vic.gov.au/grassfire-research)

STORY AMY SCHILDBERGER



PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

## NEW LIGHT TANKER DELIVERED

CFA's new 1.2.4D light tanker, made by Bell Environmental in Sunshine, is the latest version of the very successful brigade-owned light tanker concept offered to brigades under the Victorian Government's Volunteer Emergency Services Equipment Program (VESEP).

To satisfy updated operational and health and safety requirements, it differs from previous versions in the following important ways:

- all-aluminium frame and rollover protection bar
- 1,300-litre maximum capacity roto-moulded polyethylene water tank with baffle balls
- water-cooled Kubota D902 diesel engine-powered water pump

- fully stowed double width nearside stowage locker and auxiliary equipment bin
- Stihl MS3111 chainsaw and associated equipment stowed in nearside locker
- 4.5kg dry chemical fire extinguisher stowed in nearside locker
- 25-litre drink cooler on nearside deck floor
- suction hoses stowed across front of body
- 65mm Storz couplings on delivery and tank fill lines
- LED lighting (except for two hand-held halogen spotlights).

So far, 20 of these light tankers have been delivered to brigades.

STORY ELLIOTT BARNFATHER



PHOTO: TROY LONGSON

## BUSHFIRE AND NATURAL HAZARDS RESEARCH

CFA is a leading member of Australia's first research centre for natural hazards. The new Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) is building on the findings of the Bushfire CRC and extending into other natural hazards.

In early 2013, after severe bushfires across south-east Australia, Prime Minister Julia Gillard, announced that the new centre would be up and running by 1 July 2013, with a full all-hazards research program.

With an eight-year tenure and \$47 million in funding from the Cooperative Research Centre's program, the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC was tasked to carry out practical

research to reduce the social, economic and environmental costs of natural disasters.

As well as CFA, the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Research CRC is supported by all Australian and New Zealand fire and land management agencies and emergency service agencies, 20 universities, the Bureau of Meteorology and Geoscience Australia.

A broad research program is now underway, with a multi-disciplinary approach to the major national issues across the natural hazards' spectrum.

The research has three major themes – economics, policy and decision-making; resilient people, infrastructure and institutions;

and bushfire and natural hazard risks. These are not hazard specific, but span the priorities for agencies working in an all-hazards environment. The research program will be profiled at the joint Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council and Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC annual conference in Wellington, New Zealand in September.

To find out more about the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, go to [bnhrc.com.au](http://bnhrc.com.au), and keep up to date by liking the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC at [facebook.com/bnhrc](https://www.facebook.com/bnhrc)

STORY NATHAN MADDOCK



# Learning from incidents

## Learning from field trips

Field trips (also known as staff rides) are a relatively new concept in Australia and are a powerful learning tool where participants revisit the location of an incident. Based on the military model, any CFA member can participate in a staff ride.

A staff ride is not about laying blame or singling out individual decisions. It brings together evidence, personal accounts, photos and audio so that participants are in a similar position to the original responders. It's designed to give participants the opportunity to understand the factors that contributed to the fire and the decisions made, and consider what they would do in a similar position.

Examples of staff rides can be read online at the Wildland Fire staff ride library ([fireleadership.gov/toolbox/staffride](http://fireleadership.gov/toolbox/staffride)) or search for 'staff ride' at [bushfirecrc.com](http://bushfirecrc.com)



PHOTO: CFA DISTRICT 14

### KALKALLO-DONNYBROOK ROAD FIRE FIELD TRIP

The Kalkallo-Donnybrook Road fire in District 14 on 18 February 2013 was a unique opportunity to learn from a fast-running grassfire impacting the urban interface. During the after action review (AAR), it was identified that fireground leaders could explore key lessons. As a result, Northern and Western Metropolitan Region set up a field trip to address AAR outcomes and, more importantly, to learn together and develop an open and honest process to share their experiences.

The field trip was developed with a lot of help from members who played a key role on the day of the fire, including personnel from MFB, Parks Victoria, Air Services Australia's aviation rescue and firefighting service and a range of CFA personnel.

#### PARTICIPANTS

Representatives from all District 14 brigade groups went on the field trip. There were four half-day sessions held over two Sundays in early December 2013. The 48 participants received a booklet about the event, so they could familiarise themselves with the situation beforehand. An additional field trip was organised for 24 multi-agency participants.

#### FIELD TRIP

The field trip began at Craigieburn Fire Station with a briefing about CFA's learning culture, which emphasises a no-blame approach. Three District 14 operations officers acted as facilitators, guiding the participants through the incident.

A field trip moves through a series of 'stands', where critical decisions were made across the fireground. Participants stop at significant spots to discuss key decisions and to gain an understanding of the unfolding story from the perspective of the people actually involved. There were five stands during the Kalkallo-Donnybrook Road field trip: stand 1 – Woody Hill (point of origin); stand 2 – Summerhill Road; stand 3 – Vearings Road; stand 4 – Craigieburn Road East; stand 5 – Cooper Street. Participants were also given an operational situation audio, so they could hear the experiences and emotions of the people involved in the incident.

#### OUTCOMES

The field trip finished at the Cooper Street BP petrol station with lunch and a wrap-up session. This gave participants the opportunity to reflect on their impressions of the day and lessons learned. The story of the Kalkallo-Donnybrook Road fire reminds us of the complexities of urban interface fires, and the field trip gave participants an excellent learning experience with a focus on the further development of leadership skills and understanding of human behaviour.

For more information on the Kalkallo-Donnybrook Road field trip, contact Regional Operations Coordinator Deb Sullivan ([d.sullivan@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:d.sullivan@cfa.vic.gov.au)).

### THE USE OF RISK INTELLIGENCE

When the Kalkallo-Donnybrook Road grassfire started, fire behaviour analysts in the State Control Centre produced a potential impact area. This information was passed to the Mapping Unit. Because of the potential risks of a fire starting so close to the urban fringe, the Mapping Unit used, for the first time, the Victorian Fire Risk Register – Bushfire (VFRR-B) information in the eMap software to analyse which assets could be impacted.

This information was given to the State Emergency Management Team, which used it to plan a collaborative response. The speed, accuracy and ease of using the VFRR-B information were praised by all agencies. This led to the development of an automated process for the 2013-14 fire season, which was a dramatic shift in the process and its acceptance across all agencies.

The VFRR-B support team recently transitioned into the Risk Intelligence team within the Fire and Emergency Management – Service Delivery Strategy team. This allows the team to provide current risk-based information using risk intelligence information, knowledge, networks and relationships.

# Learning through case studies

A case study is an explanatory story based on a real-life incident that looks at what happened and why it happened. The aim is for people to learn from the case study so they improve their decision-making in time-critical situations.

## WARRNAMBOOL EXCHANGE FIRE

### SUMMARY

The partial or complete destruction of a telephone exchange by fire, with large-scale loss of service, is a rare event. There have only been a handful of comparable events worldwide in the past 50 years. Although this was a straightforward firefight, the consequences of the event weren't truly felt until after the fire was out. Along with communities and businesses, CFA had to continue protecting lives and property without standard communication. Barwon South West Region and all those involved in the incident displayed innovative and problem-solving to ensure the community was supported through the event.

This case study gives an overview of the incredible work in Districts 4 and 5 and explores the questions asked in the weeks following the incident about the potential consequences, with a focus on business continuity and the need to be ready for a worst-case scenario.

### INCIDENT OVERVIEW

On 22 November 2012, the Warrnambool Telstra telephone exchange was damaged by fire, resulting in a major communications breakdown across much of south-west Victoria. The communication outage impacted over 60,000 phone lines, 16,000 broadband internet services and 65 mobile base towers. It affected more than 100,000 people for up to three weeks. For CFA, this resulted in loss of radio communications to VicFire, phone lines and a loss of alarms for protected premises.

At around 4.30am, the fire alarm in the Telstra exchange in Warrnambool was triggered. Despite a response time of only four-and-a-half minutes, the building was well alight and significantly damaged when CFA crews arrived. Because there was an additional member on duty, the crew of four was able to attack the fire inside the building using breathing apparatus (BA). The internal attack would have been delayed had this not been the case.

The fire appears to have originated near the maintenance control room and spread rapidly. Disruption continued as equipment failed in rapid succession until power supplies were disconnected for the safety of



emergency personnel. During this time, communications had broken down with VicFire. Following extensive salvage operations to secure the building, the site was handed over to Telstra at approximately 10am for clean-up.

In earlier discussions between CFA and Victoria Police, it was decided that the police would be responsible for incident management because of the significant consequences to the community. The event was officially transferred from CFA to Victoria Police at the first emergency management team (EMT) meeting at about 10am.

### ISSUES

#### > Communications failure

With the incident occurring in the early morning, the extent of the communications failure wasn't fully understood for some time. There was initial confusion over which communications were functioning, because some parts of District 5 (particularly the north) still had Telstra mobile coverage while other parts didn't.

At the incident, CFA's rostered duty officer quickly lost communications with VicFire, but Victoria Police's communications still worked because it uses a different system. During the early stages of the incident, the only way to communicate with VicFire was to place a CFA dispatcher at the police console in Ballarat, which was established within 45 minutes.

It was soon realised that Optus services were still working, and at 9am a number of Optus mobile phones were bought and given to CFA members. Unfortunately, all redundancy mobile backups were congested, though pagers, trunking and standalone radios were still functioning because of satellite backup.

At the first EMT meeting at 10am, there was a smooth transition from CFA to Victoria Police and the incident moved into the next stage of response. At this meeting, police portable radios were given to representatives from other emergency agencies to maintain the first line of communication between team members.

#### > Going back to the old days

CFA members have a huge amount of experience and knowledge, which were crucial to formulating the processes that kept operations running. They pushed the boundaries on current planning and procedure documentation which meant they had to move away from prescriptive thinking and use Mission Command principles.

There was a major impact on CFA's operations. Although pagers were working, initially there was no way to communicate internally within CFA and with VicFire. Warrnambool Fire Station had the infrastructure and ability to set up a temporary VicFire, which was established by noon, and this allowed everyone in the district to speak with Warrnambool. Career firefighters at Warrnambool also agreed to carry pagers because of the inability to recall staff, and each shift was fully briefed on the current situation.

Group networks were the glue that allowed brigades to function in such a chaotic environment. Groups used their locally-developed group communication processes and went back to the old systems, including the group network command channel 11. Brigades were out and about, staying in touch with the community and keeping on top of their needs.

#### > Impact on community expectations

Protected alarm premises were one of the initial major issues because of the expectation that a fire truck will respond when an alarm is activated. The District 5 Community Safety team was given a list of protected premises from ESTA, and prioritised the premises based on risk. The team informed all local brigades of the situation and visited all District 4 and 5 protected alarm premises to tell them their alarms wouldn't work. They were advised to use the Optus network to contact triple zero or dial 112 from a Telstra mobile to contact emergency services, and monitor their site around the clock if they thought it was necessary.



#### > Agencies working together

Interoperability and having a multi-agency approach to the incident was crucial, as was having a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities. Victoria Police said it was important to have support from all agencies, particularly from the municipality and emergency service organisations, when dealing with the complex communications issues.

A regional emergency management team (REMT) had already been set up for an incident in District 4 on the day of the Warrnambool exchange fire. This meant it was an easy transition for the REMT to run both incidents, because all the key players were already in place. Having an REMT outside the affected area, supporting the local EMT during the early part of the incident, was extremely beneficial. However, it was decided to run the incident fully from the EMT and the REMT disbanded at the end of the District 4 incident.

The initial EMT meeting included only the key personnel and took only five to 10 minutes because they had insufficient communications to contact other agencies. The EMT was later expanded to incorporate all personnel in this broad-ranging incident. There was a CFA emergency exercise that day, so there was already a large number of representatives from the agencies in town.

The EMT worked extremely well together, largely because of the good relationships between those involved. They frequently train and work together so they were able to easily get on with the job. The EMT continued to meet until all major issues had been resolved. It disbanded on 3 December.

### FINDINGS

- CFA members need to be more aware of the importance of turning out to alarms. This incident could have been a lot worse if the brigade had not responded so efficiently to an alarm call.
- Existing, strong relationships with external agencies and other emergency service organisations before an incident makes working together in a multi-agency incident a lot smoother.
- Business continuity planning is important, particularly holding exercises at all operational levels around business continuity and worst-case scenarios.

- To develop CFA members, it's important to identify and explore the successful decision-making displayed by members, as well as the mistakes that are inevitably made. Working through a scenario (either factual or fictional) provides a valuable opportunity to think through worst-case possibilities, potential opportunities, unusual problems, non-routine responses and unintended consequences.

### DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

The following thought-provoking questions have been asked to demonstrate how the consequences of this fire could have been dramatically different. After the event, those involved in the incident seriously thought about the difference between the actual consequences and the potential consequences.

- What if pagers hadn't worked?
- What if there was no knowledge of the old group communications network?
- What if Optus communications had also failed?
- What if a significant incident had occurred in the affected area at the same time?

### CONCLUSION

Every incident is an important source of organisational learning. Research has found that expert decision-makers effectively prepare for worst-case scenarios by questioning assumptions about the situation, imagining how things could go wrong, and developing multiple backup plans to deal with a range of eventualities. Although challenging to develop and difficult to execute, the ability to think through worst-case outcomes is a critical skill because unexpected events happen all the time and can pose considerable risk to agency members and the community. Plan for the worst and hope for the best.

From a firefighting perspective, this was a standard response. However, with the extensive consequences, not unlike the Longford gas explosion in 1998, it created major problems for CFA, other organisations and the whole community. Barwon South West did a fantastic job using Mission Command principals, together with experience and local knowledge, to deal with the issues. There was some duplication of effort, but this shows members were in the same frame of mind and applying the state controller's priorities.

## 2013 Tasmanian bushfire reports

Three reports into the 2013 Tasmanian bushfires were released in October 2013.

The *2013 Tasmanian Bushfires Inquiry* focused on three incidents (the Forcett, Bicheno and Lake Repulse fires) and made 103 recommendations relating to fire operations, police operations, traffic management, community communications and warnings, evacuation, emergency management arrangements and recovery.

The Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) audit review made 14 recommendations. AFAC auditors concluded that learning lessons from the fires shouldn't come at the expense of learning from aspects that went well. The strategic management of the fires was broadly appropriate and there was no evidence that property losses were made worse by strategic decisions made while managing the fires.

AFAC and the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre commissioned the University of Tasmania to carry out research to get a better understanding of the community response to the fires. The findings of the preliminary report included the following:

- The most frequently-reported long-term preparations by those surveyed were clearing vegetation around the home, having an unwritten bushfire survival plan and clearing a space around the home. The three most frequently reported short-term preparations were packing a kit ready to leave, checking the fire danger rating and clearing leaf litter from the yard.
- Most people preferred to receive warnings by mobile phone.
- A third of those surveyed took decisive action more than two hours before the fire impacted.
- The three most common factors that caused residents to leave were smelling or seeing smoke, receiving an official Emergency Warning other than an Emergency Alert, and receiving an Emergency Alert.



Some lessons for CFA members include:

- The importance of recording all actions and decisions made during incident operations.
- Transfer of control and the need to have a clear communication strategy outlining the roles of all involved to eliminate any confusion.
- The benefits of pre-formed IMTs. The system worked effectively, with pre-formed IMTs in place and, in many cases, there was little requirement for a formal transfer of control.
- The provision of timely and accurate warnings and advice to the community. More than 200 community warnings were issued and great feedback was received regarding the information provided.

## Observation Sharing Centre now live

The Observation Sharing Centre is a new online resource developed by CFA to complement our debriefing and learning processes. This application, which can be accessed by all agencies' staff and volunteers, lets us share observations, initiatives and lessons.

Observations from incidents can now be captured and logged throughout the year, instead of waiting until the end of the season for formal reviews and debriefs. They can be made on behalf of a crew, team, brigade, district or an individual. The observation may be positive, negative or an unexpected experience, and can be based on operational or non-operational activities. Information gathered from after action reviews (AARs) can also be entered into this online database.

We encourage all members to also share their initiatives and lessons to ensure CFA members can learn from best practice and drive continuous improvement. Your lesson could be a success, a way of doing things more safely or more efficiently, a close call, or anything that others could learn from.

You can use the Observation Sharing Centre by contacting FIRS Call Centre (1800 628 844), by going to Brigades Online, or by visiting [surveygizmo.com/s3/1449131/observation-sharing-centre](http://surveygizmo.com/s3/1449131/observation-sharing-centre)

For more information about learning from incidents, contact the Fire and Emergency Management Performance Improvement team on 9262 8499 or email [performance-improvement@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:performance-improvement@cfa.vic.gov.au).



## Chief's Leadership Program kicks off

**A special Leadership Development Program formulated and run by CFA Chief Officer Euan Ferguson has brought together 20 seasoned and potential leaders from around the state for an intensive weekend of study, reflection and discussion.**

This course is unique because it isn't just a one-off experience, but allows participants to track their development over the course of a year. In the months between the weekend gatherings, they must complete 'missions' linked to their daily lives and are challenged to stick to principles and lessons learned.

"This initiative was about building up a network of current and future leaders who are confident not only in their role as a leader of a team, but in themselves as people," said Euan. "By understanding our values, we can lead ethically and with forethought, respect and humility.

"It's about being the best we can be. And I'd encourage any CFA member, whether or not you're a leader, to take any opportunity you can to learn and improve yourself.

"There are a lot of well-developed, professional training programs that you can take advantage of, so it's a matter of grabbing the chances as they come up," he said.

Euan, who brought along his personal collection of leadership books, also urged participants to read and understand the quotes and writings of great historical leaders such as Sir Ernest Shackleton and Sun Tzu.

District 23 member Lachlan Gales said that while he'd been fortunate in his CFA career to take other leadership courses, this one offered a rare chance for extended focus, and also opened his eyes to just how different brigades are around the state.

"The experience around the table was as considerable as it was varied," he said. "I had some great conversations that left me slightly in awe of the diversity of CFA brigades, as well as the mix of personalities and motivations of my colleagues."

STORY SONIA MACLEAN



PHOTO: SIMAN JEPSON

## CELEBRATING CFA WOMEN



**Above:** Participants and advocates of the Women and Fire mentoring program (left to right) Andrea Thomas, Adrienne Anson and Jacinta Ermacora

PHOTO: WARREN MITCHELSON

**Women at CFA do amazing things for the agency and their communities. To recognise and commend the many roles they play, CFA has put together a special publication to honour their past and present contributions.**

Through succinct stories and stylish black and white photos, 20 exceptional stories are combined to create one narrative – the fundamental value of women to CFA.

Called *Celebrating CFA Women*, the stories are about individual women and two key programs run by CFA specifically for women – Women and Fire mentoring program and Stepping Stones. The stories represent the wide-ranging contributions of CFA women, both on the fireground and behind the scenes, and demonstrate what women give and receive as CFA members.

As noted by CFA member Andrea Thomas, "I underestimated myself ... I far exceeded my goals and now I'm a mentor to four young women. Being around positive people has made me a positive person."

The launch of the booklet coincided with International Women's Day (IWD) with good reason. This annual day of celebration is a time to reflect on progress made and to celebrate acts of courage and determination by ordinary women who've played an extraordinary role in their communities. Appropriately, the 2014 theme for IWD is 'Equality for women is progress for all'.

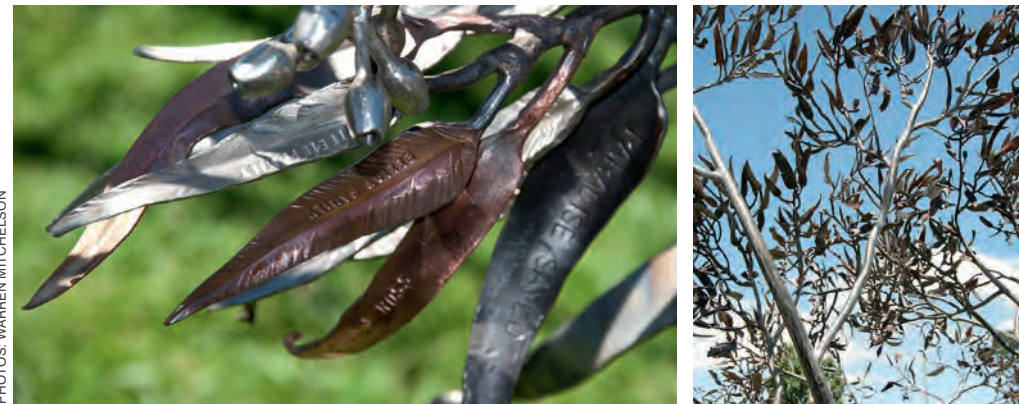
Around 20 per cent of CFA members are women, but they make up more than 50 per cent of the community. CFA aims to be representative of the community, and the launch of the publication on IWD is a powerful statement about CFA's commitment to increasing women's participation.

Along with honouring CFA women, the booklet uses the medium of storytelling to communicate to women – who may have little knowledge about the emergency services sector – that being part of CFA is a lot more than firefighting. Or as the Snake Valley and District brigade women so persuasively state, "It ain't just lamingtons".

**If you'd like a copy of the booklet, contact your district headquarters. There's also an animated version on Brigades Online. For more information, contact Project Coordinator Debra Salvagno on 9262 8696 or email [d.salvagno@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:d.salvagno@cfa.vic.gov.au).**

STORY DEB SALVAGNO

## Blacksmiths' Tree takes root



PHOTOS: WARREN MITCHELSON

In mid-February, the magnificent Blacksmiths' Tree was erected in Strathewen after five years in the making.

The three-tonne, 9.8-metre tall stainless steel and copper gum tree bears 3,500 leaves wrought by amateur and professional blacksmiths from across Australia and the world.

Cliff Overton – a CFA member at Seymour District 12 headquarters brigade, former CFA employee and current manager of Corporate Planning and Sustainability at MFB – got involved very early on.

"I volunteered at the Whittlesea Fire Station on Black Saturday and went out on the Diamond Creek truck the next day," said Cliff. "I then spent time out in the fire-affected areas recording the losses while the fires burnt.

"About a week into the fires, I saw a leaflet advertising the Tree Project. I didn't know anything about working a forge then, but the idea grabbed me."

The idea for the project started in a blacksmiths' internet forum, though the initial plan was to create just a shrub. The enormous worldwide interest, however, turned the shrub into a representative gum tree with some artistic interpretations of gum leaves by overseas' makers unfamiliar with the species.

Many leaves have a name or message stamped on them. Some are the names of people, cats, dogs and horses who died in the 2009 fires, while others were sponsored by fire-affected people, offering messages of hope and support.

Inscribed on the base of the tree, it says, "I have

risen from the flames – I have stretched across the earth – I am shining with your name."

Of course, the tree is laden with symbolism: something beautiful has been created – not destroyed – by fire. Messages of strength, and love support and hope are inscribed on the branches.

"I learned how to be a blacksmith by meeting other blacksmiths," continued Cliff. "It's one of those romantic, primitive crafts, but it's really the art of blacksmithing that appealed to me; making something beautiful rather than practical."

Cliff made many leaves, including one for each CFA area before boundary realignment.

The trunk was sponsored by Bendigo Bank and some branches were sponsored by MFB and the Fire Services Commissioner.

"I suppose it's also a symbol of sector reform," said Cliff. "All the services are welded together."

"It's also been part of the process of renewal and recovery for the community. It's a massively connected structure, supported by people generous with their skills and time like local council people involved in recovery and Regional Arts Victoria.

"And every time I turn around, people are making an offer – a skip or a crane... whatever they have to give. What started as a memorial to loss has become a tribute to community.

"The project manager was Amanda Gibson and all her time has been volunteered. I can't say enough about how much she has given to this project."

STORY LEITH HILLARD

## BENEFITS FOR ALL CFA VOLUNTEERS

Many CFA volunteers don't realise the support and opportunities offered by Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) which was set up to represent volunteers and help them best serve their communities.

VFBV was established under the CFA Act to represent all CFA volunteers in dealings with CFA, government and others who influence the work volunteers do and the support they receive. VFBV is independent of CFA and government, is run by volunteers for volunteers, and listens to what you have to say on matters that affect you.

Just over 90 per cent of brigades and groups are financial members, giving every volunteer in member brigades access to special benefits, services and opportunities.

A recent government inquiry into CFA recognised VFBV's vital role and recommended that VFBV looks at opportunities for closer involvement with individual volunteers. VFBV is always looking to provide better service and value for brigades, groups and individuals, and is keen to work with you to make this happen.

VFBV can help CFA volunteers in many ways including leadership scholarships; support with brigade grant applications; access to financial support in times of personal hardship; opportunities to give input on issues and attend workshops and forums; representation and advocacy on CFA and policy matters; providing information kits

and volunteer merchandise; and the opportunity to have a genuine volunteer voice.

You can learn more at our website ([vfbv.com.au](http://vfbv.com.au)), Facebook page ([facebook.com/cfavol](https://www.facebook.com/cfavol)) or on Twitter ([twitter.com/vfbv](https://twitter.com/vfbv)). You can register at [vfbv.com.au](http://vfbv.com.au) to receive updates on CFA news, hot issues and developments in your areas of interest.

STORY ANDREW FORD, CEO VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

### VOLUNTEER SATISFACTION SURVEY

The VFBV Volunteer Survey, developed and run by volunteers for volunteers, will return in mid-2014. Survey findings are considered by the CFA Board, CFA management and the government. It's a great opportunity for volunteers to give feedback about what matters most to them. Register at [vfbv.com.au](http://vfbv.com.au) now and you'll receive a link to the survey when it's launched in May.

VFBV is the voice of the volunteers and can only be stronger if you take part. If you have any questions, email [vfbv@vfbv.com.au](mailto:vfbv@vfbv.com.au) or phone 9886 1141.

## David Morrison Daylesford Road Rescue District 15

faces of  
CFA



PHOTO: DARREN GREWIS-JAMES

### How long have you been with this brigade?

I joined Daylesford brigade in 1979. I was trained in road rescue a long time ago and I've been learning ever since. I've been an officer for more than 20 years at Daylesford. This year I was appointed first lieutenant of the brigade. As well as being a volunteer, I'm also a PAD [practical area drill] operator at Fiskville Training College.

### Why did you join CFA?

My dad was the resident officer there for more than 40 years and we lived at the fire station, so you could say that I was born into CFA. My mum and brothers are also Daylesford brigade members and I have a nephew at Wendouree brigade.

### What was the first incident you attended?

It's a lot time ago, but I think it was a grass and scrub fire. When I joined, all the old members of the brigade mentored me and it was on-the-job training. In those days, you got on the truck and the experienced firefighters told you what to do and how to do it.

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

There are two that stand out. The famous 97-year-old Bellinzona guest house fire at Hepburn Springs in 2003 was significant. It was an icon and caused over \$4 million damage. The other job was a tanker that crashed at Sailors Falls, near Daylesford. It was loaded with 45,000 litres of diesel and unleaded fuel. That was a big fire.

In terms of road accident rescue, we attend about a dozen incidents a year. A head-on collision in the 1990s at Sailors

Falls stands out. It was a fatal. We managed to release a young boy from a very confined space inside the crumpled van, but he later had to have the lower half of his leg amputated.

### How often do you train for road accident rescue?

In short, frequently. That's the thing with road rescue – you have to practise otherwise you lose the skills required. New design and technologies in cars means that you have to keep up with the best rescue techniques. A few times a year, the CFA Rescue Association goes to General Motors Lang Lang Proving Ground where we train on new cars that have the latest design features. For instance, there has been a change in how we now work around car airbags in some vehicles.

### What do you do when you're not attending incidents?

Clay target shooting, fishing and hunting. I like nothing better than sitting on the bank of a river with my mates, enjoying the peace and quiet and just having a good time. I'm also a member of the Daylesford Pistol Target Club. My favourite weapon is the 686 Smith and Wesson revolver – .357 Magnum. In competition, you get to fire around 60 rounds.

### What music do you like to listen to on the drive home from a job?

On the way back, we prefer to talk through what happened and how we might do things differently to improve next time we go to a similar incident.



PHOTO: MICHAEL CAWTHAN

## No boundaries to disability

Epping Fire Station had a major refurbishment and a new motor room built in 2012. As a result of the renovations to the station's front entrance, however, Epping member Anthony Gray and his companion dog Cougar had some difficulty with the door because he uses a wheelchair and has limited hand use.

We are a pretty tight-knit group at Epping and we look after each other, so when we see one of our members needing help, it's a call to arms for all.

Anthony joined the brigade in 2001 as a young man looking for adventure and keen to help out in the community. He qualified as a wildfire firefighter and low structure firefighter. He was also keen to do outdoor sports and turned his athleticism to BMX bike riding.

But, in 2004, a devastating riding accident left Anthony in a wheelchair.

This didn't stop Anthony from continuing his volunteer service with the brigade, and he was awarded his 10-year medal in 2010. As he's still eager to help out wherever he can, the brigade has begun a fundraising mission to convert the station front door to an electronic opening door.

"I feel very humble that brigade members are doing this for me," said Anthony. "It's truly a great gift from them to help me in my work with Epping brigade."

Anthony sees no boundaries for people with a disability, as he has shown us with his work for the brigade and local community.

STORY MICHAEL CAWTHAN

## NEW STATION AND REFUGE AT BLACKWOOD



**Left:** At the official opening were (left to right) Premier of Victoria Dr Denis Naphthine, Minister for Police and Emergency Services Kim Wells, Captain Ian Stewart and Councillor Pat Toohey  
PHOTO: COURTESY OF MOORABOOL NEWS

In mid-January, the Blackwood Fire Station and Community Fire Refuge in District 15 was officially opened by Premier of Victoria Dr Denis Naphthine. The facility, was designed by fire engineers to survive the severest of fires.

The Minister for Police and Emergency Services Kim Wells attended the opening. "This is the first time in Victoria, and probably the world, that a combined fire station and community fire refuge has been planned, designed and constructed from scratch," Kim Wells said.

"This new \$1.5 million facility now offers the Blackwood community a place of last resort. However, it should not be considered a substitute for a planned and practised personal survival plan."

Blackwood is surrounded by the Wombat State Forest and Lerderderg State Park, so is in the middle of a fire-prone area with few bushfire survival options.

The facility directly meets one of the recommendations of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.

It has a remote opening system and direct contact with the incident control centre in Ballarat and the State Control Centre in Melbourne. Other features include heat shields, a standby power generator and a fire protection system which will ensure the refuge can be operated by the community.

During the official proceedings, Captain Ian Stewart was presented with an automated external defibrillator (AED) on behalf of the brigade. The AED was funded through the Volunteer Emergency Services Equipment Program. When accepting the defibrillator, Ian expressed his thanks for the program and said, "If it saves one life, it will be well worthwhile."

STORY IRENE KEATING

### NEW STATIONS

Hardies Hill's new fire station in District 15 was officially opened in December. It features a two-bay motor room, six car parking spaces, a locker area, toilet and a rainwater harvesting system.

Two brigades in District 10 celebrated CFA Sunday by officially opening their new fire station. Minister for Police and Emergency Services Kim Wells unveiled memorial plaques at Munro and Glengarry brigade stations.

## NATIONAL MEDAL FOR JOHN BARRY

It was very much a family affair at Ullina Fire Station in early December, when Barwon South West Regional Director Bob Barry presented a posthumous National Medal to his brother John.

John passed away in 2011 after a long and distinguished history with CFA. Since joining in 1969, he had the roles of lieutenant for eight years, captain (18 years) and deputy group officer (eight years). As an engineer and quality assurance auditor, and working across a number of shires, John also played an instrumental role in the development of the original Municipal Fire Prevention Plan model that was established for use across the state.

The medal was presented to John's wife, Janice, in front of a gathering of brigade members, John's family and Creswick Group Officer Alan Hives. It was clear from the fitting and heartfelt tribute, and reminiscences after the presentation, that John has had a lasting impact on the organisation at brigade and group level and beyond.

CFA runs in the Barry family's veins, with John's wife Janice having over 20 years' service in Ullina brigade, son Tim serving as the current Ullina brigade captain,



sons Lindsay and Andy, as career firefighters at Ballarat City and Corio, and daughter Katrina, who has almost 15 years' service.

In an additional presentation, Operations Manager Geoffrey Gray, along with Bob and Tim, awarded significant service medals to four brigade members whose combined service is a remarkable 200 years. The medals were awarded to: Ken Muller (40 years), David Anderson (45 years), Graeme Keith (50 years, and received by son Russell on his behalf), and Wally Cook (65 years).

STORY STEPH WIGAN

**Above:**

Left to right: Wally Cook, Bob Barry, Ken Muller, Janice Barry, Geoffrey Gray, Russell Keith and David Anderson

PHOTO: STEPH WIGAN

## New vehicles for District 6 brigades

**Below left:** Cressy members with their new light tanker

**Below right:** Terry Mulder hands the keys of an ultralight tanker to Beeac Captain Scott Richardson

PHOTOS: ANNIE HERITAGE

Two vehicles were handed over to District 6 brigades Beeac and Cressy on a sunny Sunday in mid-December.

In the morning, Beeac brigade received a new ultralight tanker from Member of Parliament for Polwarth Terry Mulder. Beeac Captain and Beeac Group Officer Scott Richardson gave a special thanks to brigade members and their families for their continuing support.

In the afternoon, Terry Mulder travelled to Cressy brigade for the official handover of a light tanker. Deputy Group

Officer of Lismore Group Trevor McPadden spoke about the importance of this vehicle not only to the local community but also to the Lismore Group.

Cressy Captain Brad Nelson made a point of mentioning the fantastic support the brigade received from previous Operations Officer Brian Brady. "Without Brian's support, we do not believe Cressy brigade would have been lucky enough to receive this vehicle," Brad said.

STORY ANNIE HERITAGE





PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

# Chief visits District 8 hazards

Chief Officer Euan Ferguson toured District 8 late last year inspecting hazards and the expansion of industrial sites around the bay.

During his visits to several fire stations including Dandenong, Mornington and Rosebud, Euan met staff and volunteers and was interested to see the changing face of the Mornington Peninsula and Westernport Bay.

Each area has its own unique problems such as tourist seasons with holiday-makers and

campers and a huge increase in road traffic. Holiday homes have vehicle access issues for brigades and the nearby beaches can be packed with cars and caravans.

Although the new Peninsula Freeway has benefited the area, it means even more cars are travelling to the peninsula. The fuel load throughout the district varies from tea tree to thick scrub along foreshores and creeks and long grass growth inland across to Westernport Bay.

With more homes being built (especially among heavily-treed properties around Arthurs Seat and Mount Martha), and the development of industry (notably the new Port of Hastings expansion), it's essential for brigades to plan their strategies and resources to meet these new challenges.

To see more images and video go to [news.cfa.vic.gov.au/district\\_8\\_hazards](http://news.cfa.vic.gov.au/district_8_hazards)

STORY KEITH PAKENHAM

# Vols take a break at the tennis

Twenty CFA volunteers cooled off in a corporate box at the Australian Open tennis tournament after a very busy week fighting fires.

Delaware North Companies Australia and New Zealand opened its 'super box' to thank volunteers nominated by their region for their significant contribution to their brigade and community. Also enjoying the tennis were participants from Chief Officer Euan Ferguson's Leadership Development Program (see the story on p25).

Gruyere Fire Brigade Secretary and District 13 Peer Support Coordinator Pat Bigham had a fantastic time.

"The venue is brilliant and our hosts really turned it on for us. I'd just expected to go and watch the



PHOTO: ROZ LONG

tennis, not be waited on hand and foot. It was unbelievable," said Pat. "I arrived not knowing anybody, but by the time the matches were over I felt like I'd known everyone for a long time.

"The timing of that night was perfect. After the week we'd all had, it was really good. I was working in communications at the Woori Yallock ICC, shadowing all the incidents in District 13 so

that if something was elevated we were ready to go straight away."

It was Wandong Fire Brigade Captain Yorin Miller's first time at the tennis. "They were good games. We got a really good view of the whole match from the super box - it's pretty good up top. I could get used to that!"

STORY JASON LEIGH

# FUNDRAISING INITIATIVE AT EMERALD



Left: Members of Emerald brigade (left to right) Adrian Trimnell, Tom Dawe, Xavier Delattre, Jo Ray, Klaus Brodeck

PHOTO: NICK WALDRON

Recently, Emerald brigade's newly-formed fundraising committee worked on a long-term plan that would meet the needs of the brigade. Following much brainstorming, the standout idea was to create and sell a 2015 CFA-themed premium diary which includes monthly fire safety messages for the community.

This concept was developed further, with the idea that all CFA brigades could buy this diary from Emerald brigade to sell to their local community. Brigades would keep the profits earned from the sales and use the funds to buy new equipment or even start saving to replace a brigade-owned vehicle. There are also opportunities to sell advertising inside the diary to local businesses.

"This certainly is an innovative concept and I am proud that we're able to provide a diary that can be used to further educate the community on fire safety, plus assist other

brigades across the state in their fundraising efforts," said Emerald Captain Paul Yandle. "I know the significant time and effort our brigade spent fundraising to replace our salvage truck. I hope this gives brigades a smarter and more efficient way to raise the funds they need."

If there's strong support for this diary from brigades around Victoria, it will be repeated in 2016 and beyond, which will give brigades a fundraising opportunity they can prepare for well in advance.

Emerald brigade has sourced a very competitive price for these customised leather-covered A5 diaries and it encourages brigades to take advantage of this opportunity and start planning for their future. To place orders or to find out more about the diary, go to [emeraldcfadiary.org](http://emeraldcfadiary.org).

STORY KLAUS BRODECK

## Leadership

Be able to make timely and effective decisions

# INVENTOR OF THE YEAR

A Narbethong firefighter has been named Victorian Inventor of the Year by the Inventors Association of Australia.

After developing the Pump Defenda for two years, Rod Sheppard has released the device designed to protect private firefighting pumps from flame contact and radiant heat. The 53-year-old has been inventing all his life, but only became a commercial inventor in the past five years.

"A lot of people invent things but not many go that extra step to turn their invention into a commercial product," said Rod. "It's quite a slog. You've got to do market research, find money and work out how to reach people."

While facing the challenges involved with getting a new product known and on the market, Rod is taking inspiration from his great grandfather, Hiram Crawford. Rod knew his ancestor was a

founding member of the Country Fire Brigades Board (the precursor to CFA), but he only recently uncovered his remarkable life story.

Hiram Crawford came from the US at the height of the gold rush and, after a slow start, found 3,000 ounces of gold in three months near Beechworth. He set up a stagecoach empire and settled in Beechworth, where he became one of Victoria's largest growers of hops and tobacco.

In 1864 Crawford imported from the US one of Victoria's first fire engines - a Niagara - and was captain and superintendent of Beechworth brigade for 25 years. He also loved making new-fangled agricultural machinery, though much of it was never put to practical use.

"I definitely got my entrepreneurial spirit from him," said Rod.

STORY SONIA MACLEAN



# THE NEW COMMUNITY SAFETY COORDINATOR ROLE

**Below:**  
Vaughan Stott from Caroline Springs brigade at a community fire safety day

PHOTO: BLAIR DELLEMUN

**Right:**  
Noble Park brigade's William Chau on CFA Sunday

PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

Since the first truck rolled out of its station, CFA brigade members have been out and about speaking to campers about using camp fires safely; talking to property owners about overgrown vegetation; giving fire safety messages to local schoolchildren.

The new mandatory role of brigade community safety coordinator on the brigade management team (BMT) might not change anything for some brigades, but it's a cultural shift brought about by recent changes to brigade and membership classification. While many brigades already have this function in place through a current lieutenant's portfolio, a community safety representative on the BMT formally places fire prevention alongside fire suppression as core business for brigades.

How you fill this role is entirely up to your brigade. Flexibility is the key. This new mandatory function can simply be added to an existing lieutenant's portfolio (if it's not already). The brigade captain might be the best person for this job, or an additional member who's passionate in this area can join the BMT. The community safety coordinator doesn't even have to be an operational firefighter. Brigades can choose the model that best fits their needs.

There's no minimum requirement of work for this role. "It's not like we're telling busy members that you now must also do 10 hours of community safety a week," said Deputy Chief Officer Steve Warrington. "What we do know is that,

as a CFA member, you have a highly-respected voice in your community. Coming from you, community safety information makes a big difference. Brigades have been doing it for years, so now it's just about building it into the brigade structure to demonstrate just how important it is."

## DEVELOPING THE NEW ROLE

Captain Bill Boyd of Yarra Glen brigade said that one of his lieutenants currently has the community safety portfolio but they've "had a volunteer move into the area who is really stepping up to the plate from a community engagement perspective". This member recently joined the brigade with her husband and doesn't have a great interest in firefighting, but "she's getting really involved in the community side of things and doing some great work," said Bill.

"Dare I say, at our next elections she might take on this role more formally on the BMT. It will free up the lieutenants to concentrate on other things, yet ensure the brigade treats this as a big part of what we do."

Yarra Glen brigade is not the only brigade that's taking an enthusiastic approach to this new role. Captain Jon Crowley at Murchison brigade is thinking long term. "We don't have



an election until 2015, but our BMT is in favour of filling the role with an additional member on the BMT if possible," Jon said. "Right now, we have a couple of members, along with myself, who are fairly active with engaging campers along the river about their fire risk. In addition to this, the brigade gets involved in the town's Tomato Festival, and last year we got the mobile education bus up here for it.

"I'm not sure yet whether a standalone member will be added to the BMT or whether it's me or one of the lieutenants, but it will just formalise who in the brigade is contacting the region about getting the latest publications and resources. That's vice versa too – if the region is planning some community safety activity in Murchison, it knows who to contact."

Whatever the capacity of a particular brigade and the local risk, the flexible structure of the BMT allows a brigade to cater to its specific needs. For brigades with a strong focus on suppression, maybe this is the time to start thinking a bit differently about how to recruit within the community. For example, Drouin West brigade has looked outside its current members and secured the services of a person who will coordinate its community safety activities. In addition, the brigade specifically advertised for a Fire Safe Kids presenter and found a local person who will dedicate their time to deliver the Fire Safe Kids program to the local primary schools.

"A lot of the volunteers here are more interested in the operational side of things, so that's fine," said Drouin West Captain Bruce Jewell. "I want to make sure the community still gets the appropriate level of fire safety information, so we try to recruit into the brigade the best people. We know local brigade members are seen as authentic and trustworthy."

## HOW CFA SUPPORTS THE ROLE

There's a range of support available for members taking on the community safety coordinator role. CFA members can now gain the competency Participate in Community Safety Activity, which is available through CFA as either Recognition of Prior Learning or through self-paced learning with a follow-up assessment. Members can also do further training or development to deliver core CFA fire safety programs such as Fire Safe Kids or Fire Safe Youth in schools, or programs for adults such as home bushfire advice or presentations about bushfire safety or home fire safety. If you want to enhance your community safety knowledge, contact your regional community education coordinator (CEC).

Last year, CFA developed the Community Safety Coordinator Toolkit to help members who want to carry out this role. An initial batch was distributed at the 2013 CFA Community Engagement and Fire Awareness State Forum in Bendigo. It's a folder full of reference documents and all the fire safety programs. The toolkit is really handy for those active brigades enthusiastic about community engagement, but the *Members Quick Reference Guide* publication may be more useful for smaller brigades. This pocket-sized guide is full of key messages about bushfires, grassfires and house fires and contains information about all CFA's fire safety programs.

For larger brigades with the capacity, there could be a team of members that supports the community safety coordinator on the BMT. Sample role descriptions have been developed for all roles, in line with new member classification. The sample role descriptions

## VOLUNTEER BUSHFIRE SAFETY PRESENTER PILOT

Many brigade members have talked to their communities over the years about fire safety at community events, school fetes, fire station open days and in the supermarket. It's well known that CFA volunteers are highly-respected in their communities and that fire safety information coming from them is more likely to be listened to.

To support this important role and ensure that the most current advice and information is being delivered together with consistent messages, CFA ran a pilot that allowed volunteers to get the Bushfire Safety (Fire Ready Victoria) Presenter accreditation. The aim of the pilot was to arm volunteers with the necessary knowledge and skills to deliver vital bushfire safety information to their community through community meetings and education sessions.

More than 20 volunteers from three districts took part in the pilot training, which involved a one-day face-to-face session followed by the completion of a variety of theory and practical assessments and mentoring. Feedback from participants was extremely positive and, although there will probably be some minor modifications to the training package, this opportunity will be made available again in the lead-up to the 2014-15 fire season.

To get involved in the next round of this training, or to find out more, contact Fire Ready Victoria Program Manager Erin Bulmer on 9262 8603 or email [e.bulmer@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:e.bulmer@cfa.vic.gov.au).

which directly relate to community safety are: community information and education, community engagement and relations, vegetation management, and fire prevention. Each CFA region has a CEC and vegetation management officer who can give support to members taking on these roles.

Brigades with elections this year will see 'Community Safety' on the election forms. This function will then become mandatory from elections in 2015 and 2016.

For more information about changes to member classification and the flexible options for brigades, contact your operations officer or email [memberclassification@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:memberclassification@cfa.vic.gov.au).

STORY: JAMIE DEVENISH AND ERIN BULMER



## HUME



## Alan Davies

As I write, we are part way through a typically long, hot and arduous summer in north-eastern Victoria.

Our high state of preparedness has proven to be the key to successful fire management. The focus on an initial heavy attack, the rapid establishment of the fireground command structure, and the timely transition to the local command facility, when necessary, have been terrific.

Most of our fires with serious potential were held between 50 and 100 hectares, despite the severe weather conditions.

Rock solid support and leadership from the districts, region and Level 3 incident management teams to our members on the ground, and timely and appropriate advice to communities at-risk will continue to be our focus. Thank you for your excellent work.

I would like to recognise the arduous conditions under which firefighters have been operating, particularly during heatwave conditions. For this reason, I have copied parts of the latest Safety Fact Sheet for Hume Region members:

- Heat-related illness and exhaustion are presenting as our most common incident type to date. It is important that hydration guidelines are followed and electrolyte drinks are rotated with water. Wherever possible, rest areas in the shade should be provided. All personnel must monitor the wellbeing of those around them and report any concerns to their supervisor as soon as they have concerns. People succumbing to heat must be treated as soon as possible to reduce their temperature.
- Controllers, managers, and supervisors at local and state level must ensure that fatigue guidelines are applied rigidly. There has been an increase in the types of incidents that are commonly associated with fatigue, such as slips and trips, and minor strike injuries. As well as personnel in the field, decision-making suffers when personnel performing administrative tasks are affected by fatigue, so it is crucial that duty time limits are applied to these roles as well.
- Vehicle incidents are occurring with alarming frequency. Only personnel properly familiar with particular vehicles should operate them. Vehicle incidents also arise from fatigue. Take care when transporting personnel at the end of a shift to ensure that already-tired personnel are not put at risk by driving.
- There have been a number of hazardous tree incidents, where trees or parts of trees have fallen. Hazardous tree guidelines and procedures must be reinforced to all personnel.
- A core element of safety is all personnel taking responsibility for their own welfare and the welfare of their team members by actively looking out for each other.

Firefighting is about working within a trained and focused team. Please continue the good work. Your personal commitment to organisational values, people and purposes is appreciated.

## GRAMPIANS (REGIONAL COMMANDER)



## Philip Beasley

As you read this article, the fire season is hopefully starting to wind down as we near the end of March. I want to first pay tribute to the wonderful work done by both our volunteer and career staff over what has been a very challenging season, not only for Grampians but also across the state.

It's a testament to the professionalism and dedication of all our members that, despite major bushfires in our region – particularly the Grampians Northern Complex and around Stawell – we were able to minimise the loss of life and property through the extremely dry and hot conditions during the fire season.

This has not been a case of luck. Our well-trained brigades and groups working with Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI), Victoria Police, State Emergency Service, Ambulance Victoria and support agencies such as the Department of Health and Department of Human Services and local government, were at the centre of a cohesive operational structure and strategy to combat and recover from major fires.

The cooperation between CFA and DEPI has again been outstanding. There are many examples of excellent interoperability and timely transfer of control to ICC Level 3 that demonstrate our CFA and interagency systems are working extremely well. This was particularly the case in the Northern Grampians Complex of fires that ran for several weeks, including community recovery and rehabilitation works.

Both on the ground and in the air, it has been an excellent combined effort. Aircraft played a major role this fire season and were used effectively, along with immediate heavy ground attack, to contain potentially dangerous fires. This cohesive use of assets on the ground and in the air was sustained throughout our operational response over the past four months.

I want to pay tribute to our crews on the fireground who did an outstanding job protecting critical infrastructure and local community assets and manning strike teams to protect communities outside their region and district.

I also want to commend our CFA members and colleagues from the other agencies who staffed district offices, district command and incident control centres in Grampians Region. They worked long and hard to manage and sustain operations on the fireground and support our members. Finally, we cannot forget the people behind our firefighters: their families and employers who generously support the overall CFA effort in protecting local communities.

As we move into the post fire season, we will begin to review how we performed. We welcome your constructive feedback about this fire season so that we can capture any opportunities for further improvements in our preparation and response for next fire season.

## EASTERN METROPOLITAN



## David Baker

Although we had a delayed start to summer in our region, at the time of writing this column we have now well and truly caught up with the rest of Victoria. All predictions suggest it will be a long season with little break in the fire weather pattern.

Our members have already been hard at work assisting with firefighting in the Grampians, the Mallee and in Gippsland. Indeed, some of our members even headed interstate to South Australia while they were deployed to the west.

In addition, many of our members have been deployed to incident management teams at Horsham, Hamilton, Bairnsdale and Orbost. On the home front, there has been a constant call upon members to staff ICCs, RCCs and DCCs around the region, and we have pre-positioned strike teams locally on particularly high-risk days as part of our enhanced preparedness.

Our mental approach during this campaign period will be a large determinant in how we manage the fatigue associated with a heightened operational tempo. We need to be mindful that our seasons are now becoming marathons and our mental stamina will support the inevitable call upon our physical stamina.

I have seen great examples of our members taking advantage of lulls in activity to recharge and prepare for the next burst of preparedness and deployment. Getting into a rhythm as opposed to random escalation and de-escalation will see us getting through the season. Creating and promoting this rhythm will be the focus of the region for the rest of the summer season.

I was recently reminded of the very essence of what CFA is about when an elderly man from The Grampians recently dropped into Lilydale brigade to thank members for their assistance during the recent fires in his area. This resident and his son had defended his property and, at his lowest point of devastation and exhaustion, he heard a siren and watched as a tanker emerged from the smoke.

In the laconic and humble manner exemplified by our members, the crew leader simply asked, "What can we do to help, mate?" The man became quite emotional when he explained to the brigade support officer that, despite losing a lot of his property, the CFA crew saved him because of their actions and the kindness and sympathy they showed.

Never forget what our service to the community is truly about.

## LODDON MALLEE (ACTING)



## Mike Wassing

Over the past two months, I've had the privilege of witnessing the amazing contributions of people helping people. You could argue this would be the norm, especially given that our multi-agency approach in Victoria is to work as one. However, it's always nice to see it in action.

The operational tempo in Loddon Mallee and the state has been well above average for an extended period of time. Since Boxing Day last year, we have experienced significant fires across the region. But, importantly, there has been no loss of life and minimal property loss or damage.

We have received, and been humbled by, great support from other CFA districts, regions, CFA HQ, families and employers. Our Bendigo Fire Equipment Maintenance staff have repeatedly provided assistance in the regional control centre and District 2 Command Centre. Operations officers from District 14 and District 8 have provided much-needed support. This is in addition to the numerous incident management team personnel and strike teams that have aided the frontline.

More recently, two teams from Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) have operated in Gisborne and Bendigo incident control centres. This has taken the motto of working as one within Victorian emergency services to a national level with the same success. Integration of local staff and volunteers with their peers from QFES has not only assisted incident management, but has also seen shared experiences in areas of common interest.

The same principle occurs within our communities. During a recent major fire, several hundred people in a community responded to an Emergency Warning. The local football club, without request, began coordinating and supporting locals who needed help. Their response was not only consistent with the intent of protecting lives and property, but provided an environment of confidence and safety with minimal firefighting resources.

In a final, great example of people helping people, I recently attended the introductory session of a Train the Trainer program to establish a new pool of volunteer structural instructors in Loddon Mallee. This was facilitated and led by Instructor Steve Zerna and Training Officer Rebecca Pethybridge. This initiative aims to build on the successes of the Bushfire Train the Trainer program. Volunteers were enthusiastic about the program and used their existing knowledge, skills and attributes, along with supporting tools, to become an important part of the region's training and assessing team for structural firefighting.

While there are undoubtedly similar examples of the same approach and commitment across agencies, government and within our communities, I take this opportunity to say thank you!

## BARWON SOUTH WEST



## Bob Barry

As we move into the later stages of the fire season, I'd like to thank our volunteers and staff for their contribution to the protection of lives and property in Barwon South West, across Victoria and interstate. The time commitment and the physical effort involved in delivering our essential front line services are significant, and something our Regional Leadership Team truly acknowledges.

Barwon South West Region has been supported by our interstate counterparts and their professional support is appreciated. Our region has had the opportunity to return the favour with two strike teams being deployed to South Australia under the very capable leadership of Operations Officer Brendan Lawson.

The major fire operations across Victoria this season have clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of the state's arrangements for bushfire. Our emergency messaging, Warnings and Advice have been delivered to our communities in an efficient and effective manner. Our Public Information personnel have contributed to ensuring our communities are informed and safe.

It would be remiss of me not to make special mention and pay tribute to all our volunteers and staff who have been working tirelessly behind the scenes in district coordination centres, incident management teams and at district headquarters providing business continuity. To all these people we can only say thank you, a job well done!

To our partners in emergency management, particularly the emergency service organisations, we say thank you. Our ongoing relationships and camaraderie have reached a new level. As we move into the new emergency management arena, it is easy to see our future will be in true partnership.

Looking to the remainder of our business, your BSW Region will see significant improvement to infrastructure with the completion of another 19 new stations under the rural fire station program. We have also seen the start of the planning for new major stations at Portland, Warrnambool and Coleraine. The assistance we receive from CFA's Land and Building Department is appreciated.

It's also important to recognise that our work on the front line is not limited to operational response. At the beginning of February, I had the privilege of attending a unit citation presentation for members of Corio Fire Brigade's A Shift. It was humbling to be there, not only to hear about the work undertaken by Corio but to see a whole range of community leaders and organisations coming together to celebrate the bestowing of this honour. The event was truly a reflection of the diversity in our community.

We must continue to embrace our culture of helping our mates and neighbours, as this is the true Australian spirit.

## GIPPSLAND



## Mark Potter

As I write this, Gippsland volunteers and staff have been actively involved in firefighting for many weeks. We have been able to maintain a high level of commitment to strike team deployments, incident management team roles and also continue to maintain a high-quality service to our local communities. I have been able to travel to various parts of Gippsland during this bushfire campaign and I am regularly impressed by, and thankful for, the dedication and commitment of all CFA members in undertaking their roles. Thank you to all our people who are currently leading, undertaking and supporting these essential activities in Gippsland.

What is most impressive is how CFA members are working cooperatively with other emergency agencies including Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI), State Emergency Service (SES), Victoria Police and Ambulance Victoria, towards a common goal. Thank you all for your contributions in protecting ourselves and the communities in Gippsland. There is no doubt that we still have a long way to go and I ask all members of the Gippsland team to look after yourselves and your colleagues.

It has been my privilege to be the son of former Chief Officer Brian Potter. This has allowed me to further my understanding of volunteerism, firefighting and leadership. The most defining piece of advice, and the one that I will remember forever as I know he served CFA working to this, was a description of a leader's role. The leader within CFA is, in order, a friend; a mentor; a leader.

This leadership advice is relevant to any form of relationship, including staff to volunteer, volunteer to volunteer and staff or volunteer to the community. This is a tried-and-tested model and I encourage all of you to think about using it in your day-to-day relationships. We will always function more efficiently and effectively by making the time to develop strong friendships with our fellow firefighters and leaders.

My father also taught me the value of humility, empathy, humour and, most importantly, respect. Respect those you have met and understand their beliefs and passions. Take the time to develop relationships that will enable you to be a better person. These relationships will place you in a powerful position that enables the objectives to be achieved regardless of the course of events.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone in CFA who has rallied around Gippsland recently. This thanks is also extended to all other agencies, in particular DEPI, Parks Victoria, Victoria Police, SES and MFB. We are a strong collective of committed people and we have done ourselves proud.

Vale Dad.

Twitter: @gipps\_potzii

## NORTHERN AND WESTERN METROPOLITAN



## Greg Esnouf

The fire season might have started a bit slowly, but it has certainly arrived with a vengeance, with major fires in our region and other parts of the state. As I write this column in mid-February, we have major commitments at the Mickleham-Kilmore fire and are supporting firefighting efforts at Hazelwood. Similarly, there have been major resource commitments in East Gippsland for the past couple of weeks.

I would like to acknowledge the ongoing and undiminished commitment of all CFA personnel in Northern and Western Metropolitan Region through this difficult period. I am constantly amazed at how our people will keep giving and giving to support the firefighting operations and incident management teams. I ask you all to make sure you look after yourself and those around you. Be safe, manage your fatigue and health, and take a break when you need to.

I also want to thank our interstate colleagues who've travelled from Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and NSW.

We have also been busy with a revised approach to community education in our grassland areas this summer, with new messaging, letterbox drops and street meetings directly targeting residents who live on the urban interface adjacent to grasslands. This is a direct outcome of the lessons learned from the Kalkallo fire last summer, and has been very successful with a significant increase in people attending street Fire Ready Victoria meetings this year.

There is a much better understanding of the difference between grassfires and bushfires, and the different responses people need to make in these environments. This more-focused information, combined with refined Warnings and Advice messages during incidents, has led to a change in people's behaviour this summer, with a significant reduction in traffic congestion and anxiety in residents.

We are also targeting the very effective and well-received Home Bushfire Advice Service at high-risk bushfire locations in the region. This is being delivered through a combination of visits to individual properties and street-based information sessions.

I would also like to apologise to those members who were affected by the need to postpone the scheduled presentations of National Emergency Medals over the past few weeks due to operational activity. New dates will be advised shortly.

It is with great sadness that I note the passing of Captain Frank Hauke of Wildwood brigade following an ongoing illness. Frank began with CFA in 1983 at Monbulk brigade and was a member of Wildwood since 1992 and captain since 1999. Frank also held the positions of second and fifth deputy group officer and group communications for Hume Group, and was a dedicated member of the driver educator team throughout the years at District 14. Frank was revered by those who served with him and learned from him. He will be greatly missed.

## SOUTHERN METROPOLITAN



## Peter Schmidt

At the time of writing this article we, together with broader CFA, were still dealing with the impacts and ongoing fire campaign challenges. This has been another busy fire season.

There have been significant resource demands in Southern Metro Region and, in the usual exceptional cooperative manner, brigades and groups have come together to support other brigades across the state.

We supported the Grampians' fires by providing around half the state's strike teams based outside Grampians Region. This was a great effort by our brigades. There was ongoing strike team, incident management team and operations officer support to all the major fires across the state, with most concentrating on the East Gippsland campaign.

Our effort most recently culminated in the events of 9 February. On that day, we experienced the worst fire conditions since Black Saturday just over five years ago.

We were very fortunate to experience only a small number of local fires that day, and those that did start were very quickly dealt with by ready and well-prepared crews.

There were so many fires springing up across the state, that the number of members from Southern Metro Region deployed outside our region was probably a record.

Within a matter of hours, 12 strike teams and approximately 450 personnel were dispatched to support others in immediate need. We cannot begin to quantify the incredible level of work required across the various levels of incident management, groups and brigades to achieve nothing short of a brilliant and committed team effort.

Thank you all, once again, for your dedicated service to the communities of Victoria.

On another note, our infrastructure projects are all progressing well, with many tenders being let and station builds in various stages of planning and building applications.

The long-awaited new regional/district office and emergency management complex is still on track, and we anticipate moving into it around late May or early June this year. This will provide suitable time for the commissioning and conducting of scenario testing of the new complex prior to the next fire season.

In closing, may I once again recognise all members' efforts in supporting our communities and the great energy of our community safety team for its ongoing work preparing and supporting our communities to stay safe.



## RESEARCH INTO FIREFIGHTER HEAT STRESS

**Above:**  
Measuring physiological and biometric factors while doing physical activity

PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

**Below right:**  
Reducing the body's core temperature using the Kore Kooler chair

PHOTO: MARK SULLIVAN

**CFA takes firefighter health and safety very seriously and, thanks to new research by CFA's health team in conjunction with Deakin University, fire agencies across Australia now have a better understanding of what their firefighters go through.**

Using the latest high-tech equipment, the health team monitored physiological (or bodily) responses of firefighters across Australia while they carried out a range of tasks in different environments. The tasks included hose line handling, fire suppression and victim rescue. The research findings have been subjected to peer review and published in Australia and overseas in fire journals and *Time* magazine.

The new technology records data about core and skin temperatures, heart rhythm, heart rate and breathing rate, and transmits the information instantly to a nearby computer. We're now in a unique position where we have data in all environmental conditions, from the sub-zero climate at Mount Buller in winter, to the hot and humid conditions experienced by firefighters in the tropical areas of northern Australia.

The research to date has focused on how paramedics and health support teams assess and respond to heat stress on the fireground. This has led to developing procedures and methods for managing firefighters during operational duties, and being able to make decisions about our members' physical state so they can safely return to their tasks or take a break from the fireground.

One of the major findings is the discrepancy between tympanic temperature and core temperature. On the fireground tympanic temperature, measured at the ear, is the main way paramedics determine whether or not a firefighter is experiencing heat stress. However, our research shows that the core temperatures of firefighters exiting an incident are regularly underestimated, with differences of up to 3°C.

Such evidence has led CFA and Deakin University to explore alternate measures of temperature, including skin temperature, infra-red temperature, heart rate and subjective measures of thermal comfort. Gastrointestinal (core) temperature is the gold standard for assessing heat stress on the fireground, but because it's impractical to measure we need to find another way.

According to heat stress scales, normal core temperatures are between 36.5°C and 37°C, and temperatures higher than 39.5°C are considered dangerous. CFA research shows that while carrying out typical firefighter tasks, even in the cool temperatures of Mount Buller, the core temperatures of firefighters can climb to levels considered mildly hyperthermic in a matter of minutes.

Early signs and symptoms of heat stress include thirst, headaches and light-headedness, while more extreme cases are characterised by nausea, dizziness, confusion and loss of consciousness. In the absence of a reliable measure of heat stress, it's possible that individuals are putting themselves at risk.

Heat stress is a major hazard on the fireground and to prevent it firefighters need to prepare properly before a call-out and have appropriate rehabilitation after an incident. Extreme weather conditions, physical activity and alcohol intake all contribute to dehydration and can increase a firefighter's risk of experiencing a heat-related illness.

During periods of rest, it's vital that firefighters rehydrate and remove excess clothing to allow for evaporative heat loss. However, CFA's research shows that core temperatures can increase for five or 10 minutes after finishing physical activity, unless other cooling methods are used.

Bringing down the core temperatures of our firefighters is the primary concern and active rehabilitation is the best way to do this. To find the most successful and practical cooling

method, CFA and Deakin University carried out numerous trials. They assessed cooling in the shade, whole body immersion, and hand and forearm immersion with both cool towels and the Kore Kooler rehabilitation chair.

If active cooling techniques are not implemented, the body can't shed the build-up of metabolic heat which will lead to heat stress or heat stroke. By placing the body's extremities in water, you can cool the blood in the lower arms and hands and this then returns to the body's core and cools internally in much the same way as a radiator in a car's motor.

Hand and forearm immersion has consistently been shown to reduce core temperature more rapidly than cooling in shade and is the method of choice for brigades and rehabilitation units across the state.

The results of this research are being used to inform agencies' policies and procedures relating to firefighter rehabilitation in Australia and overseas. But it's important to note that one size does not fit all. For example, whole body immersion gave good results in Darwin's hot and humid climate, but the water in Darwin was around 25°C, which is fairly comfortable in that setting. In Victoria we're looking at water temperatures closer to 10-15°C which is likely to shock the body.

The best approach in one country, or one part of Australia, may not suit another. In Australia, where we experience so many weather extremes, we need to approach heat illness and rehabilitation differently.

So far, the team has completed trials at Mount Buller, Darwin, Knox, Wangaratta and Peshurst, and more research is planned this year.

In addition to this heat stress research, the health team also responds to call-outs for health support at incidents across the state, where it monitors firefighters' health and provide rehabilitation support.

**The health support duty officer can be contacted on 9262 8844 or requested through VicFire.**

STORY PETER LANGRIDGE



## HeadsUP online tool is now available

**CFA members now have easy access to mental health advice at any time of the day or night thanks to a new online tool that can be accessed from any internet-enabled mobile phone or computer.**

The HeadsUP online tool, available at [cfa.vic.gov.au/headsup](http://cfa.vic.gov.au/headsup), provides access to a range of information and tip sheets to help CFA members deal with psychological health and safety issues, including mental health, potentially traumatic events (also called critical incidents), bullying, harassment and discrimination, and interpersonal conflict.

Creating a safe and healthy workplace is a shared responsibility and incorporates both physical and psychological factors. This means that all CFA members need to identify actions that negatively affect the mental health of members and reduce the impact of these actions.

CFA has committed to creating a psychologically healthy workplace by:

- providing mental health awareness
- providing management training
- identifying hazards, assessing risks and implementing controls
- creating policies, programs and procedures that support a psychologically healthy environment.

HeadsUP will continue to be updated with new information as it becomes available. There's also a feedback option at various points throughout the tool, and we encourage users to tell us what they think.

CFA also has a range of other welfare services to support members and their families.

- Peer support can be accessed through the rostered duty officer, officer in charge, line manager or the peer coordinator.
- Psychologists/counsellors can be contacted directly via the Member Assistance Program on 1300 795 711.
- Chaplains can be contacted directly or via Converge International on 1800 337 068.

If you have any queries about HeadsUP or psychological health and safety at CFA, contact Organisational Wellbeing on 9262 8836 or email [org.wellbeing@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:org.wellbeing@cfa.vic.gov.au).

STORY TANYA DI MICHELE

# CFA SUNDAY SUCCESS

Another successful CFA Sunday was held at the end of Fire Action Week on 24 November, with more than 200 brigades participating across Victoria.

Brigades went all out with fire demonstrations, jumping castles, sausage sizzles, colouring-in competitions, face painting, truck displays, smoke houses and fire safety workshops. It was obvious that a lot of thought, commitment and preparation went into the day. Well done to all the brigades that took part.

Enjoying CFA Sunday: 1 Eltham; 2 Wooragee; 3 Narre Warren; 4 Truganina; 5 Glenrowan, South Wangaratta and Thoona brigades at Hamilton Park; 6 Noble Park; 7 Scoresby; 8 Toomuc



PHOTO: ANDREW HEATH



PHOTO: BRUCE RAY



PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM



PHOTO: LUCY ABBOTT



PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM



PHOTO: WENDY CORMACK



PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM



PHOTO: MICK DAVIS

### UPCOMING EVENTS

- State Rural Championships, Geelong**  
5-6 April
- Annual memorial service, Fiskville**  
4 May
- National Volunteer Week**  
12-18 May

# Summer training for Nillumbik Group



Nillumbik Group held its pre-summer training in the first week of December, with over 85 members involved in exercises around Eltham, Research and Warrandyte.

The group practised strike team convoy driving, draughting from a collar tank, tackling a running grassfire, using Class A and entrapment procedures.

The fire scenario was a grassfire that started in the Warrandyte area and, under a south-west wind, threatened Eltham, Research and North Warrandyte. The scenario was run using the Yarra Glen field operational vehicle stationed at Kangaroo Ground Incident Control Centre.

To practise fighting this type of fire and improve cooperation and accuracy skills, crews worked together to push a basketball through tall grass. Firefighters on both vehicles had to work together with a partner truck to successfully navigate a course.

In an area where reticulated water is the norm, brigades seldom have the opportunity to draught from collar tanks. Wonga Park's big fill helped with the set-up and use of the tank which holds around which 15,000 litres. Strike teams were shown how to use the collar tanks and given an understanding of the general operations of water fill points.

The session concluded with an emergency entrapment procedure, protecting an entire strike team with trucks and ensuring vehicles that had no direct crew protection had adequate coverage.

Nillumbik Group Training Manager Chas Pagon was pleased with the smooth running of the exercise and commended all brigades on their attendance and professionalism.

STORY ANDREW HEATH



PHOTOS: ANDREW HEATH

## DISTRICT 8 EXERCISE HITS IT HARD AND FAST

In early December in magnificent sunshine, more than 180 members from the Casey and Gardinia groups held a pre-summer exercise.

Crews firstly rotated through information sessions focusing on air operations, bushfire investigation, asset protection, water management and branch selection, blacking out, using Class A foam, big fill traffic management and operation and vehicle typology. There was also an overview of CFA's mobile education bus.

The afternoon session presented crews with a rapidly-developing fire scenario, with multiple ignition points providing an opportunity to quickly develop a solid incident management base in a 'make tankers' escalation.

The exercise started with a grassfire rapidly escalating because of multiple ignitions in the immediate and surrounding areas, requiring a progressive escalation to 20 tankers, five ultralights and three big fills. Aerial support was also requested.

This scenario allowed crews to test a 'hit it hard, hit it fast' approach, while simultaneously sending strike team leaders and sector commanders forward to escalation points to establish a solid control base on the fireground.

This approach was consistent with the District 8 pre-summer message and joint group planning discussions, and provided a solid platform for the fire season.

Overall, the day was a great opportunity to learn some great lessons and maintain skills. Thanks to everyone who participated and particularly to the instructors and coordinators who helped make the day such a success.

STORY MEGAN ANGEL



PHOTOS: MEGAN ANGEL

# Through the ages – Wonthaggi



COMPILED BY KEITH PAKENHAM

# Emergency Memberlink



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