

# Brigade

summer 2015

Protecting lives  
and property

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



▼ Early fires foreshadow long season



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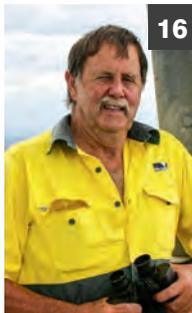
COVER PHOTO: WAYNE RIGG

### LANCEFIELD FIRE

04



09



16



35

## ACTING CHAIR

John Peberdy



# Two new leaders join CFA

At the beginning of November, we welcomed two new leaders to CFA – Lucinda Nolan as Chief Executive Officer and Joe Buffone as Chief Officer (CO).

Both have significant experience in the emergency management sector, and I'm confident they will successfully lead our organisation to an even stronger future.

Joe was CFA Deputy Chief Officer – Readiness and Response and more recently served as the Deputy Emergency Management Commissioner with Emergency Management Victoria.

He will be stepping into an extremely challenging role that requires specialist skills, deep engagement in the emergency management sector and a passionate commitment to our members, and we have no doubt that Joe is the ideal fit on all counts.

Lucinda has gained unique insights and expertise from working for more than 30 years for Victoria Police.

Her most recent appointment was Deputy Commissioner – Regional Operations.

She has shown outstanding leadership during her time with VicPol, and will bring new ideas.

It's an exciting time for us, but it's also a time of sadness as we farewell CO Euan Ferguson and CEO Michael Wootten. Both have made a real difference during their time with CFA.

Euan Ferguson began as Chief Officer in the wake of the devastating 2009 fires and the subsequent Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. During his tenure as Chief, he injected an enormous degree of both energy and commitment to this demanding role.

This has included the introduction of important fire management reforms that have had a profound effect and set the foundations for a better CFA.

Michael helped steer CFA through a challenging period of change. He has decided to leave CFA after 14 years' service on the Executive Leadership Team. In that time he made a major contribution to the financial management of CFA and to the organisation as a whole.

The Board thanks Euan and Michael for their service and contribution to CFA and wishes them the best in their future endeavours.

I'd also like to take the time to wish everyone well this summer.

The recent warm and dry conditions and rapid rate of grass curing means the Fire Danger Period and the fire season is already upon us.

Safety of our people is our number one priority and I'd encourage everyone to remain safe and healthy, and watch out for your colleagues, during what is likely to be a long and difficult fire season.

Lastly, I want to mention that the Board held its October monthly meeting in Echuca.

It was an opportunity for the Board to meet with the local leadership team in District 20.

These meetings around Victoria give us the chance to meet with members at the regional level and hear first-hand the successes and challenges of the front line members.

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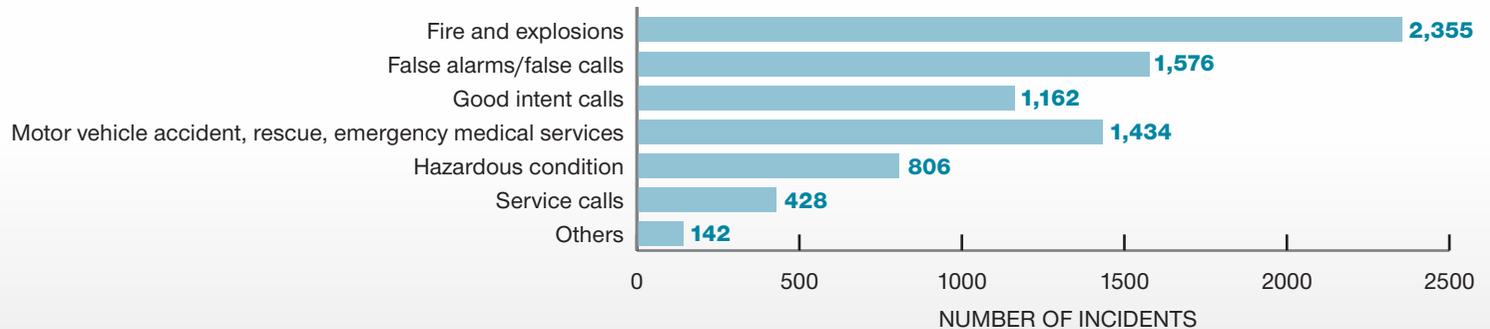
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# Incident summary

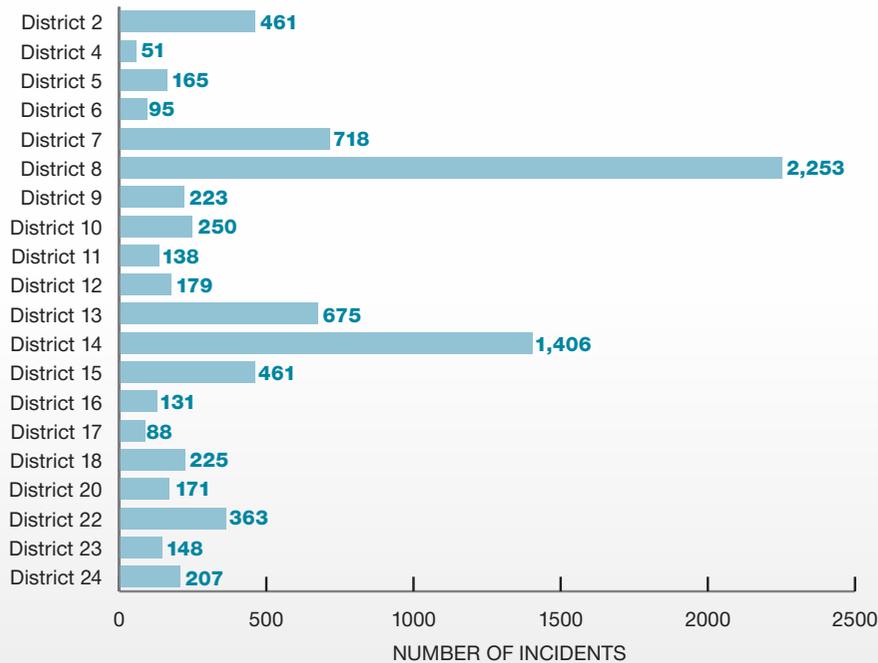
## STATEWIDE INCIDENTS BY TYPE

1 July – 30 September 2015



## STATEWIDE INCIDENTS BY DISTRICT

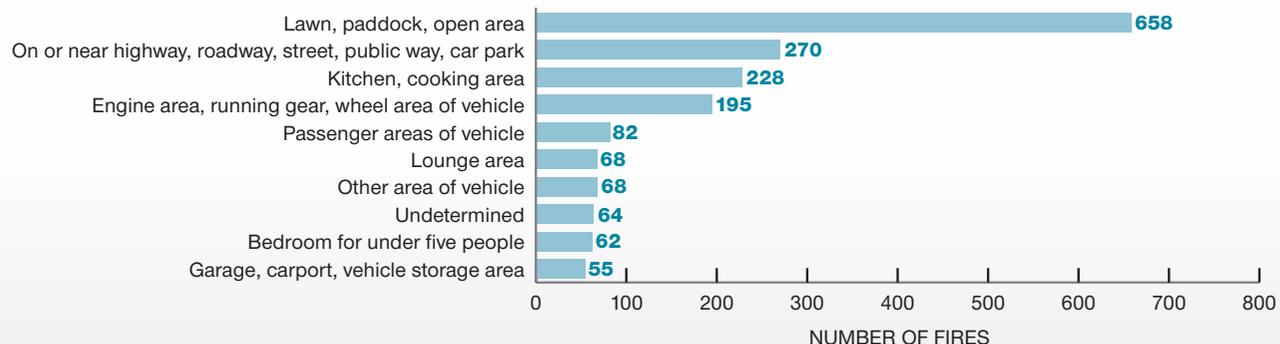
1 July – 30 September 2015



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 July – 30 September 2015



# Huge effort to save Lancefield homes

**In unusually hot and windy conditions, there were more than 160 fires across the state on 6 October, a Total Fire Ban (TFB) day. Over three days, 212 Advice messages, Watch and Act and Emergency Warnings were issued.**

Firefighters worked hard for six days to contain a fire at Lancefield in District 2, which burned more than 3,100 hectares and threatened communities in Benloch, Nulla Vale, Pastoria, Baynton and Lancefield.

It started as a prescribed burn by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) on 30 September but, during strong winds and high temperatures, jumped containment lines before being contained on 12 October.

Many homes were saved by firefighters in the Lancefield area but six were lost.

Up to 22 aircraft were used to fight fires in early October. As part of a reciprocal arrangement between states, two large air tankers also made the one-hour journey from NSW, to help fight the Lancefield-Benloch fire.



## CREWS BUZZING AFTER LONG DAY

At the time of the Lancefield fire, *Brigade* magazine talked to Matthew Pollard, the crew leader of the Epping tanker in Strike Team 1402.

The crews were tasked with asset protection in Musk Gully Road.

“Rohan [Stevens, Epping brigade first lieutenant and strike team leader] led the assessment of whether the first house was defensible,” said Matt, “and it was decided it was safe enough for us to make a stand.

“The fire was about 100 to 200 metres away from us and it looked like a ground fire although it was actually crowning – we couldn’t see that at first.

“We had to move some gas cylinders and get some lines out at the rear of the house where the fire was approaching. Epping faced the south side and Wollert faced the west. We called for further assistance but Kalkallo couldn’t get in with dense bushland ringing the house.

“The fire threw itself at us and spread around the weatherboard house. It cut off our retreat. Crews went into passive water-conservation mode until Kalkallo managed to get through and accessed the water tank on the property. We knew we’d already lost one shed. We could hear pops which we found out later were the owner’s beer kegs! There was nothing we could do – it wasn’t safe for us.

“We busted into another shed and saw the owner’s two Harleys and said, ‘We’re not losing them!’ We dragged one out and put it on the verandah, but the second one was strapped in and on a hoist. We just managed to drag it out as the fire came through [see photo, opposite].

“We felt like we won – saving the Harleys – and we knew it was going to be a major win for the homeowner. There was a big buzz between all the crews. We’d had some pretty scary moments but we were reassuring each other, sometimes distracting people away from their fears and re-tasking them.

“They all worked their butts off and did a fantastic job.

“There were a couple more houses on that road that needed attention and that’s where we got hit hard with the crowning fire jumping the road on us at height.”

ST1402 headed home at midnight, exhausted but also elated. Their pride was heightened when social media picked up photos posted by friends of the owner of the first saved house.

“Apparently the owner was ecstatic when he returned home,” continued Matt. “Social media was ridiculous and the buzz was immense by the time the whole brigade met for training.”

A second house in the street was saved by Wildwood and Bulla brigades. Wildwood tanker also later defended a house at the end of the road in a significant ember attack, supported by a DELWP bulldozer.

Kyneton Group Officer John Pearce served as the deputy incident controller and felt enormous pride in the work done by crews.

“The granite country around Pastoria is very challenging – it’s very hard for the graders and dozers to access because of the boulder-strewn landscape.

“Brigades and strike teams have done a magnificent job with asset protection,” he said. “They’ve responded without question, worked diligently and saved countless houses.”

PHOTO: COURTESY OF EPPING FIRE BRIGADE



### BRIGADE'S ANIMAL-CARE OFFER

Benloch member Shelley Cowen changed the mood of a Lancefield community meeting held when the fire was at full force.

"I said, 'To anyone who's left the Benloch area, can't get home and is worried about their animals, give us your details and we will personally drive around to feed and water your dogs, cats, chooks and birds... whatever,'" explained Shelley.

"It's just common sense but it got massive applause and brought spirits back up."

Shelley described the Benloch area at the time as "carnage. All night we could hear the crackling and the sound of trees falling."

### FIRE CAPTAINS REFLECT

Rain moved in waves outside Benloch Fire Station as a community meeting was held two weeks after the fire started. Lancefield Captain Stuart Mustey and Benloch Captain Vince Cafari were both in attendance.

The meeting ended with a community member calling for everyone present to show their appreciation for the work of firefighters, a call that was met with warm approval. It was a chilly evening but, one hour after the end of the meeting, some locals were still gathered and talking.

"Because that Tuesday was a TFB," said Vince, "both brigades had crews ready. Our truck got a call from the group telling us to just roll – not wait for a page. I was more than an hour from home but talking to the truck on the mobile and said, 'Stay safe and keep doing what you're doing'.

"Kyneton and Mt Macedon group strike teams got to us really quickly and we were coordinating crews out of the fire station, not looking at what colour overalls they were wearing. We worked side by side with DELWP the whole way.

"The first house was lost quickly," said Stuart, "and we were lucky there were no fires competing for crews. Early on a tree blew onto a car with people in it – that's how strong the wind was."

"Over nine days, including the first two days non-stop, both brigades put in about 600 hours each," Vince said. "As captain, I'm so proud of our brigade and supporting brigades and everyone's efforts.

"We had five locals at the Ops point with local knowledge. Food just appeared. I went to the staging area as many times as possible to thanks everyone – Salvation Army, Victoria Police, VicRoads, the Lions Club."

"There's no single effort," said Stuart, "only teamwork. You don't realise how well it all pulls together until you're in it."

STORY LEITH HILLARD



PHOTO: LEITH HILLARD

From left: Benloch member Barry Arlow, Benloch Captain Vince Cafari and Lancefield Captain Stuart Mustey



## Reflecting on overseas deployments

**The mid-July deployment to British Columbia was Alistair Drayton's third overseas tour of duty for CFA. This Bellarine group officer is also a CFA district volunteerism coordinator but in Canada he was a type one incident commander, equivalent to our level three incident controller.**

"We had 21 Australians in our team on the Cougar Creek fire complemented by 12 Canadians," said Alistair.

"The saying went that we have hills but they have mountains. This was a 3,000-hectare fire with not one truck on it, swift water in the creeks and rivers and snow on the mountaintops.

"Unit crews are ferried in each day by helicopter to do incremental direct fire attack, working with rake-hoes clearing a line through dense forest. It's such physical work that some of them were NFL [National Football League or gridiron] wannabes doing the job for fitness in the off-season."

The single biggest loss was the First Nations' mushroom industry which was flourishing in the duff layer.

Alistair then moved to the Harrison Hot Springs fire where campers were under a mandatory evacuation order. Across both deployments he was impressed by Canadian tree-felling protocols, the daily tracking of finances and the rapid meshing of disparate Australian responders into one rock solid team.

With large fires across 10 American states, a contingent of 71 Australian and New Zealand firefighters was deployed for five and a half weeks in late August.

Operations Officer Geoff McGill became a branch director, equivalent to a divisional commander, on the North Star fire in Washington State. The base camp housed 1,200 people and numerous chipmunks.

"We were protecting townships, hunting and fishing lodges and cattle and horses on the farmland," said Geoff. "The fire wasn't making big runs but we had 75 miles of fire edge in accessible bushland. We had to bring control lines out into the green and burn that off.

"I'd say our impact was large. We integrated quickly and got some hard tasks done professionally using humour as a tool."

Craig Brownlie focused on safety at a small outpost on Oregon's Grizzly Bear fire where there were no showers or generators.

"I was working for the incident controller, ensuring operational plans were correct and crews were briefed properly," said Craig. "An early issue was water tankers on steep roads which were sometimes just a few millimetres from a large drop, so we transferred them to other roads and established traffic management points."

Craig then moved to the Wolverine fire which was winding down in Washington State with contingency lines being put in with heavy machinery.

"I wanted to integrate into their systems as easily as possible," continued Craig, "and the very structured individual feedback we got helped us meet their expectations, along with the task book which guided us through each task."

Again, humour helped get the work done with events such as Talk Like an Australian Day.

From Craig's point of view, "Most of the job is relationships".

Bewdy!

STORY LEITH HILLARD

PHOTO: JUSTIN DALLY



## Historic Yea pub feels the heat

**The Country Club Hotel on High Street in Yea was gutted by fire in the early hours.**

CFA was called to the 157-year-old building to find the top floor engulfed by flames.

District 12 Operations Officer Justin Dally said it took firefighters around two hours to bring it under control.

"Around 50 firefighters worked to attack the flames on the upper floor externally," he said.

**INCIDENT:** Structure fire  
**DISTRICT:** 12  
**DATE:** 31 August 2015  
**BRIGADES:** Yea, Shepparton, Bendigo, Alexandra, Seymour, Wallan, Murrindindi & Woodbourne, Homewood, Limestone, Molesworth



Yea Fire Brigade Captain Rod Carbis said they couldn't access the fire until the aerial pumper arrived from Shepparton. The Bendigo ladder platform was then used to get into the building.

The job was made more difficult after part of the roof began to collapse. Hard work by crews saved the ground floor however, which is the oldest part of the pub, and the plan is to rebuild it rather than demolish it.

The pub's owner wasn't in the building overnight and there were no other occupants.

Justin said the impact of the fire will be felt by the Yea community.

"It's certainly a great loss, something of that age. It's an iconic building on the main street. I wish the owners all the best in their rebuilding journey."

A fire investigation was unable to establish the cause of the blaze because of the significant damage.

STORY ALYSSIA MORISON

## Factory fire at Moolap

**In mid-September, in the early hours, Geelong City arrived at Moon Street, Moolap, to find a fire in the Glass Metal Industries factory. The company manufactures vitreous enamel products.**

The fire had vented and was burning vertically within three storeys of office space. A 38mm line was deployed to extinguish externally, while two lines of 38mm were used to fight the fire on the inside. The initial objective was to contain the fire to the central office spaces, to protect exposures including surrounding office space and the production area of the factory.

A worker arrived with keys which allowed quick access. Thanks to this and hard work by crews, the fire spread was cut off at the entry.

The ladder platform was set up to enable external crews to remove tin and stop fire from spreading through wall insulation. This also provided a safe working platform at height.

Safety issues included falling sheets of tin, both inside and outside the factory, and a very slippery floor because of ruptured drums of cleaning fluid. Internal crews had to be careful because of missing floors in the office space and compromised stairways.

When the fire was contained, ventilation was important to help the internal crews and ensure no further spread occurred. This was achieved by raising one of the large roller doors. Further size-up revealed there had been unauthorised entry to the rear of the premises and police were requested to attend. This resulted in the arson squad attending with a CFA fire investigator.

STORY MARK BRISLANE

**INCIDENT:** Structure fire  
**DISTRICT:** 7  
**DATE:** 15 September 2015  
**BRIGADES:** Geelong City, Corio, Leopold, Belmont



PHOTO: PETER MITS

# Meet our new CEO



**Lucinda Nolan spent more than 30 years in Victoria Police before joining CFA as our new Chief Executive Officer. As Lucinda settles into the role, we caught up with her to find out more about why she joined CFA, and what she likes about the emergency services sector and her plans for the future.**

## **Where did you grow up?**

I grew up in Bayside, Melbourne, with my parents, sister and two brothers.

My parents grew up in the country – my mother came from Gippsland and my father was from a family of farmers in the Wimmera – so I have a good understanding of and connection with rural Victoria.

## **Why did you decide to join CFA?**

I had worked with many people from CFA and I had always been impressed with their commitment and dedication, particularly when you look at the number of volunteers who juggle their own work with the enormous work and contribution they make at CFA.

When I was offered the opportunity to join such a fantastic organisation it was just too hard to refuse.

## **Why did you start your career in emergency services?**

I was training to be a clinical psychologist. I had studied for four years at Melbourne University and decided to take a break from the course to get some life experience. I was looking at emergency services or defence, and chose emergency services.

Of course, the emergency services gets in your blood. The sector provides you with an opportunity to give back to the community.

## **What do you love about working in the emergency services sector?**

There is always something different and something unexpected most days.

It's an exciting, dynamic, testing environment where you need to be on the ball all the time.

When you combine that with the community service, and getting to work with people so dedicated and committed to the community, it's a wonderful sector to be involved with.

## **What are your initial impressions of CFA?**

I have met some incredibly smart and dedicated people who are doing some incredible work.

I have seen some of the operations first hand and it's been great to see the commitment all CFA people have to the community.

And the fact that many volunteer firefighters can turn out in four minutes in response to an incident is mind blowing.

## **When you aren't at work, what do you enjoy doing?**

I have a large extended family and we are all close so we spend a lot of time socialising and getting together.

I am big into sport and exercise. I go to the gym at least three times a week, and I still play netball two to three times a week.

I'm an absolutely avid and voracious reader, and I'm hooked on Nordic noir television series and books such as *The Bridge*, *The Killing* and *The Eagle: A Crime Odyssey*.

## **What opportunities and challenges does CFA face?**

In terms of the challenges, we have a changing and dynamic external environment. There are changes in the climate, and we need to look at our ability to continue attracting and retaining volunteers in such a tough and demanding environment.

But the skills and attributes of CFA members, their knowledge of operations, and their in-depth understanding of the business and technology are going to create fantastic opportunities for the future.

## **What will you be doing in your first few months at CFA?**

The aim of my first few months is to build relationships, consult with people and make sure I understand the issues, the perceptions of people inside and outside CFA and what are the new and emerging partnerships we need to tap into.

My focus has always been the front line and this hasn't changed.

Listening will allow me to better understand what the priorities are for CFA, and what are the most significant issues and barriers impacting our front line to make sure they have everything they need to keep themselves safe and the community safe.

## **What are your short-term and long-term plans and vision for the organisation?**

The short-term plans are dealing with some of the ongoing issues such as understanding and resolving Fiskville, particularly with the inquiry ongoing, the Fire Services Review and the EBA.

I'm focused on making sure CFA has the data, the information and the analysis required to make strong robust decisions. One way we will achieve this is increasing the representation of our operational arm into all decision-making bodies.

We need to further develop analytical capacity and capability, and make sure we are getting the right information and advice from the front line at the right time.

In the longer term, I want to ensure we have a strong cohesive picture of what the future holds for us so we position ourselves strongly to secure adequate financial investment, resourcing and equipment.

# New digital scanner delivered

Thousands of new digital scanners have begun to reach brigades across the state.

CFA and VFBV selected the Uniden UB436-PT primarily because of its ability to accommodate changes in digital technology. It can receive analogue signals as well as phase one and two P25 digital radio traffic. The units also come pre-programmed with CFA and DELWP radio frequencies.

Lake Entrance brigade Captain Geof Bassett was one of the members who took part in the rigorous field tests which saw the Uniden selected.

“From a technical perspective, it is everything and more that I think our members would want,” Geof said.

“You take it out of the box and within five minutes it’s programmed for your district and away you go. The fact that they arrive pre-programmed saves so much mucking around.”

CFA has a contract with Pacific Telecommunications to supply the Uniden scanner which was specially built for CFA, incorporating refinements suggested by field testers.

CFA is spending \$2 million to subsidise the scanners, with an additional \$1 million of funding from the government’s Volunteer Emergency Services Equipment Program. Brigades will pay \$150 per unit with a guaranteed minimum of eight available per brigade.

“It’s as futureproof and flexible as possible,” Geof said. “The ability to upgrade it means in another 10 years we won’t have to do this all over again when technology changes.”

CFA received 3,500 scanners in late October, with another 2,500 on their way.

VFBV is processing orders and forms are at [vfbv.com.au](http://vfbv.com.au).

It’s important to note that scanners have no send capability, and can only listen to communications. This means they are not endorsed for operational use and don’t replace a CFA-issued mobile radio.

STORY CHRISTOPHER STILL



PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

## Firefighters’ Memorial

Planning for a new Firefighters’ Memorial has entered the next phase, with work now well underway to identify a location and choose a design.

Program Manager Jason Skiba thanked the many family members, brigades and members across the state who contributed during the consultation period earlier this year.

“Over two months, members of the project team met with families and brigades who have lost members to find out what they wanted included in a new memorial,” Jason said. “The views of volunteers and staff were also gauged through an online survey.”

All submissions have been considered and will form an important part of the decision-making process.

A report summarising these views called *What the Families, Brigades and the Organisation have said* has been distributed to families and CFA brigades, and is also available on [cfaonline.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://cfaonline.cfa.vic.gov.au).

“Families, brigades and members will have more opportunities to provide feedback as the project progresses,” Jason said.

“This is a memorial for all CFA firefighters. We want it to reflect your views and the sacrifices members have made.”

The memorial recognises the 67 CFA members and 11 bushfire brigades’ firefighters who have died serving the community.

STORY CHRISTOPHER STILL

CHIEF OFFICER [www.cfa.vic.gov.au/chiefblog](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/chiefblog)

Joe Buffone

**A heartfelt greeting to all CFA volunteers and career personnel. Thank you for your dedication and great work which makes Victoria safer.**

I'm pleased and privileged to have been appointed as the Chief Officer. I look forward to working very closely with CEO Lucinda Nolan to build on our strengths and forge the future CFA as a modern, inclusive and unified fire and emergency service. I am committed to ensuring CFA members have the skills, equipment and support to do their job. I will also provide the leadership to align our operational capabilities with the new direction of emergency management, and work closely with all our partners to provide the best possible service to Victoria.

Our immediate focus must be on our preparedness and readiness for the summer ahead which is predicted to be a tough one.

The fires in early October in Victoria are a reminder of how intensely fires can burn and the impact they can have on our communities.

My call to action starts with you, our people. Are you physically and mentally prepared? Have you discussed the potential of the summer season with your partner, family and employer? If you live in a fire-prone area, do you have a plan?

Focus on the following:

- Safety is paramount at all times. Everyone comes home!
- Be ready. Brigade preparedness, equipment checked, skills maintained, capability and availability confirmed and communicated with your district.
- Active leadership in your community. Connect with your community to help them be ready, aware and prepared.
- Understand state control priorities, line of control and transfer of control triggers.
- Protect lives and property with determination. Integrated weight of initial attack should be fast, determined and thorough.
- Provide timely and relevant warnings and information to the community – they are critical.
- Active leadership with key emergency management partners in your area of responsibility.
- Know your district and regional capability and capacity and plan for the effective use of all resources.

As you're aware, CFA also provides urban fire and emergency services to the outer metropolitan area and to provincial and regional centres. We mustn't lose sight of the fact that these services still need to be maintained while preparing and responding to bushfires.

Together we make a difference. Train together, exercise together, respond together, recover together, respect each other and work as one.

## ASSISTANT CHIEF OFFICER West Region



Peter O'Keefe

**Safety is one of CFA's values and at this time of year the safety focus turns toward the approaching summer season and associated fire risk.**

Recently, there has been much discussion around the impact that accumulated fatigue has on safety. As the 2015-16 summer season begins, I ask that we all take time to reflect on our level of fatigue, health and wellbeing. Have you been getting enough sleep and rest? Have you been eating regular meals and drinking enough water? How's your overall health and when did you last have a doctor's check-up? These areas and other considerations allow us all to assess if we are ready for the challenges of a long and demanding season. After all, we want everyone to get home safe and well.

In recent weeks there has been the annual focus on pre-season briefings, exercises, workshops and conferences, in preparation for what is shaping up to be a long and potentially significant season. I pass on my personal thanks for your continued commitment in giving freely of your time by attending these sessions so that you are informed and ready. If you have any areas of concern regarding the ways in which we plan to operate this season, please ensure you discuss the matter with your local district team in the first instance. It's imperative you are clear about our approach for the coming season.

Across West Region, we have continued to reshape our organisation with the appointment of team members to new roles as we prepare CFA for the future. As I write this column, the intention is to complete the process shortly and then recruiting people into the new positions immediately after. Ensuring we have districts that are appropriately resourced so that we can support the front line of brigades and groups is imperative. This has been a challenge at some locations, and a process we are currently working through. I would suggest that if you have any concerns you should raise them with your local district operations manager.

I have been fortunate to attend a number of functions across the West Region over the past months to formally recognise a range of outstanding contributions. There have been presentations of National Emergency Medals, National Medals, life memberships and CFA service awards. I congratulate every recipient for their service.

I would like to wish all our team a safe and Merry Christmas. Spend time with your family and rest when you can. The season will be full of challenges, but by working together we will succeed.

Keep up the great work and be safe in all you do.

Twitter: @CFAWestACO

## ASSISTANT CHIEF OFFICER South West Region



Bob Barry

**As we move into a significant Fire Danger Period and continue with our regional restructure, we are indeed focused on the immediate and long-term future.**

Having been heavily involved in the recruitment and selection process as part of the restructure, there's an air of excitement as we create new teams at the regional, district and functional department levels. One key aspect of the change is we will be supporting local people to solve local problems.

I take my hat off to the staff in South West Region for their patience, enthusiasm and healthy attitude to change over the past 12 to 24 months.

I would like to take the opportunity to speak about what I call 'hidden gems' within our organisation. These gems are talented staff and volunteers who bring a lot to CFA. Over the past few years I, like many CFA staff and volunteers, have lost my parents and a sibling and have been fortunate to have the support of my wonderful CFA family to get through these emotional times. At the funerals of family and brigade members, we've been supported by Malcolm Bruce (our CFA piper) who, through his compassion and talent playing the pipes, has brought comfort to many CFA members and their families.

As a lover of the bagpipes, I could not believe the impact Malcolm had at Neil Bumpstead's (BumpeR's) funeral in October. As I sat in the police chapel, when Malcolm began to play *Amazing Grace* I could see how it affected the congregation. His note-perfect rendition, helped by the acoustics of the chapel, really made an impact on me as he walked off into the distance leaving just the silence of the mourners.

I understand Malcolm's passion to play the pipes and his commitment to support his fellow CFA members (both staff and volunteers) is absolutely outstanding. Our former Chief Officer Euan Ferguson once said to Malcolm:

*I can recall the collective feeling, at recruit graduations and particularly at solemn memorial services, as your pipes press out the fading strains of Amazing Grace. You stir the blood and trigger the release of emotion as the notes fade to a distant silence. Many are moved to tears as they reflect on the past. We remember CFA people, now gone, but forever in our hearts. Your strains open the gates of sadness, allowing a release of collective emotion and tears. Painful as this might seem, it is a precious and personal part of the journey, a journey of reconciliation of grief which helps us deal with often suppressed feelings. For others, the bagpipes are a rare moment of tranquillity, a time for reflection and introspection.*

We should recognise gifted members such as Malcolm and say a big thank you!

## ASSISTANT CHIEF OFFICER North East Region



Garry Cook

**As we enter the 2015-16 summer period, we're confronted by what appears to be a long, hot and dry period which will bring with it the heightened levels of fire risk to our communities. Similarly, the risk to our communities from sustained heat exposure is also likely to be a significant and concurrent risk.**

Planning for, and responding to, these and other potential emergencies is what we do. But we don't do it alone. We work closely with our partner agencies to ensure we have a shared focus on protecting our communities.

During the past few months, we have been listening to forecasts and observing the seasonal prognosis, watching the El Nino build in the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean Dipole strengthen – indicators that this season has significant potential. What we also know is this is not something new. We have seen similar patterns build in seasons gone by, so ignorance of what this all means is not an option for us and we should continue to prepare our teams, manage our readiness when conditions require that, and rest and avoid fatigue when conditions are milder.

This is a season that could last well into autumn 2016, so a five to six-month campaign of readiness is not out of the question. In summary, the current facts about the potential are clear. The only variable is the amount of fire and sustained activity.

Our readiness is paramount to successful operations, but our communities must also be involved in readiness activities. A strong connection to our communities and a shared understanding of the risks we face is a fundamental ingredient of the overall emergency management success. During the past few months, our community capability team has been working with brigades and districts to identify and connect with high-risk communities listed on the Victorian Fire Risk Register – Bushfire (VFRR-B). Providing information and education to these communities is vital work, but we also need to continue to promote fire safety and awareness at every level in every community.

We cannot be successful in our endeavours to protect lives and property by our actions alone, so we have to plan with our communities for shared understanding of the risks we face.

We have a vitally important role to play in the emergency management sector this fire season. We must be ready to play our part. Complacency is not something we can condone. We must look after ourselves and each other; get rest when possible and, most importantly, stay safe and make sure everyone comes home.

## ASSISTANT CHIEF OFFICER South East Region



Trevor Owen

**Leadership: what does it mean to you? As a member of your family? Your community? Your brigade?**

Leadership comes in many different forms, and CFA is a diverse organisation made up of a wide group of individuals who deliver a vast array of services to our community. Whether you are involved in prevention, preparedness, response or recovery activities, we all play a part in protecting lives and property and demonstrating leadership as a member of CFA.

- Leadership means turning up to a brigade training night to sharpen your skills, learn new things and increasing your knowledge.
- Leadership is volunteering for a strike team or being part of the delivery of a community safety initiative within the community.
- Leadership is about focusing on 'the main thing', working effectively with our agency brothers and sisters to ensure we deliver on our mission to protect lives and property. We work as one!
- Leadership is also about being self-aware and mindful of the needs of the team. We know that this summer has the potential to be long, hot and dry, with an increased chance of protracted incidents in the bush and grassland interfaces.

We know that challenging conditions, together with sustained periods of operational preparedness and response activities, take their toll on individuals and brigades physically, mentally and emotionally.

What will you do to ensure you are rested enough to give what you need this fire season? Self-care and consideration of your own health is important, and if you're not right, you can't help others.

Sometimes leadership is about doing things that aren't popular; taking the road less travelled. I encourage you to demonstrate personal leadership by putting up your hand and asking for help when needed. It's OK to say that you're not OK.

The messaging around looking out for one another remains critical. Let's not just focus on the physical safety of our job, but include important emotional safety too. CFA offers a wide variety of support services for members and brigades – you don't need to tackle this on our own.

I am pleased to see some of our members demonstrate this kind of leadership in our brigades and groups. Please be inspired by them to focus on both physical and psychological health to ensure members return home safely.

We need to ensure we are ready – physically, mentally and emotionally – to deliver on our main mission of protecting lives and property.

How will you be a leader today?

Twitter: @CFASouthEastACO

## ACTING ASSISTANT CHIEF OFFICER North West Region



Chris Eagle

**Like much of Victoria, summer arrived early in North West Region, with the Total Fire Ban across the entire region on Tuesday 6 October.**

While crews responded to several calls during the day, a fire in the Cobaw Ranges near Lancefield in District 2 grew to be a significant event.

One of the positives from this fire was the use of the mobile education unit (MEU) bus. This unit responded to the Lancefield fire on the afternoon of 6 October, and remained in operation for 13 days, including a 24-hour shift on 7 October. The bus ended its stint with a display at the Lancefield Show.

The lesson learned is not about how we deliver standard public education programs, but how we can use the bus as a key part of the public information section at an incident.

Although public meetings were held at Lancefield and Benloch each day, the MEU bus was able to give the community key information about the immediate impact of the fire and recovery when they needed it – rather than having to wait for the next community meeting.

More than 1,600 people engaged with the crew on the bus, plus an additional 530 during the Lancefield Show.

Evacuated residents were extremely appreciative of the information flow provided by the MEU team and the opportunity to return to get regular updates. This resulted in a very useful rapport being established in the Lancefield and Benloch communities.

The team on the bus was able to display and hand out current maps of the fire, communicate key messages and recovery information, show people how to find and read current public warnings and search for information from websites such as the Bureau of Meteorology.

A key advantage of the bus was its flexibility. It was able to move around Lancefield as required, but also moved to Benloch on request. Due to the design of the bus, it can quickly move around the fire area, rapidly communicating the messages of the incident management team to members of the public.

The bus was also a good source of information for CFA members and other agencies. The highly-visual nature of the bus made it a beacon for those coming into Lancefield who needed directions to the staging area, divisional command point, recovery centre, etc.

For future fires and incidents, the MEU team is most welcome back to North West Region to help solve local problems in communities that need quick, up-to-date information.

# VFBV survey's early trends

**This year's annual VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey had 33 per cent more respondents than last year, with almost 2,800 volunteers taking part including 270 from SES.**

Early results indicate a slight improvement in the areas of consultation and leadership training, and a concerning gap in performance in other areas.

VFBV is now working with Deakin University to analyse the results and explore the trends with reference to different locations, gender, age groups, brigade risk profiles, length of service and volunteer role.

The survey is run by VFBV and has been embraced by CFA's Board. VFBV and CFA will study the survey results for trends in volunteer

opinion and then present the results to the Emergency Management Commissioner and the Minister for Emergency Services.

This year, VFBV introduced a purpose-designed version for SES volunteers, hosted by VFBV on behalf of SES volunteers' association VESA. This was a great success, with sufficient respondents to make it statistically valid and a useful tool for the association and SES. The results will be published on [vfbv.com.au](http://vfbv.com.au).

Next year's annual survey will be run earlier in the year. Volunteers can register to participate by sending their name, email address and brigade to [vfbv@vfbv.com.au](mailto:vfbv@vfbv.com.au).

STORY PETER BEATON

## Welcome to Country

PHOTO: BLAIR DELLEMUN



Aboriginal Elder Uncle Ron Jones conducting a Welcome to Country ceremony at a recent CFA event

**From the beginning of 2016, all fire station openings will include a 'Welcome to Country' address to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land.**

Welcome to Country is a ceremonial practice conducted by a local Aboriginal Elder, usually through speech, story or song.

Former Chief Officer Euan Ferguson described station openings as significant events for not only the brigade but the community as a whole.

"It's a coming together, not just for brigade members but for local leaders and dignitaries, family, friends, and emergency services colleagues," he said.

"By nature these events are highly ceremonial and symbolic, so this is about adding to that sense of occasion and history.

"CFA is an iconic organisation that's part of the fabric of our communities. It's important we involve and extend appropriate respect to the traditional custodians of the land. Like us, they have a deep respect for fire and a tradition of seeking to build and improve on knowledge about the application of fire and the management of land.

"We respect the knowledge, stories and practice of fire held by the Aboriginal peoples."

Where requested by the brigade, station openings can also include a Smoking Ceremony. These ceremonies, linked to the process of cleansing or renewal, involve the use of native plants to produce smoke.

Both Welcome to Country and the Smoking Ceremony will be included in the package of service around fire station openings through CFA's Land and Building Services team.

STORY SONIA MACLEAN

## Wellbeing survey

Would you like to be involved in improving members' mental health and wellbeing? CFA is again running a wellbeing research survey to

seek feedback from members. By completing this survey, you'll be helping to improve CFA's existing services and develop new initiatives. Please visit <https://secure.insyncsurveys.com.au/surveys/cfawellbeingresearch2015>

to complete the survey online or contact CFA's wellbeing intake line on 9262 8409 for a paper version. The survey closes on 20 December 2015. All responses will be anonymous.

# Fire Awareness Award winners

**There were 85 entrants in this year's Fire Awareness Awards and the judges praised the high standard of applications.**

The award categories were updated to bring the focus back to grassroots community projects.

The judges were delighted to see that the community-led preparedness and prevention category received a high number of strong applicants again this year. More and more community groups and service providers are working together to share ideas and resources, resulting in projects that, in the future, can be adopted by other regions.

The judges decided to share the RACV Insurance Award for Excellence between Black Hill Reserve Fire Recovery Project and the Indigenous Fire Knowledge Project. The judges thought both projects were the perfect example of grassroots planning which demonstrated behavioural change.

CFA's Diamond Creek Fire Brigade took home the Fire Services Award for Local-led Prevention and Preparedness with its new parents' safety program (Fiona Macken pictured below).

"This project should be applauded for the obvious passion demonstrated in its concept as well as its strategic and integrated design," said CEO of the Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres Bridget Gardner.

"It makes intelligent use of local community infrastructure and understands the necessity to integrate important messages into the existing responsibilities of time-poor families. It's resource efficient and recognises the potential to increase reach to a specifically-targeted audience."

The awards have been presented for over 30 years as a collaborative venture between Victoria's fire agencies, and are supported by Emergency Management Victoria, RACV Insurance and ABC local radio.

The finalists were invited to a ceremony at the RACV Club on 2 December where the winners were announced. For more information about the awards visit [fireawarenessawards.com.au](http://fireawarenessawards.com.au).

STORY SASKIA VAN BEVER



## ACCESS AND INCLUSION

### Federation University students

*Spark of Brilliance*

## COMMUNITY-LED PREVENTION AND PREPAREDNESS (COMMUNITY)

### Kiewa Catchment Landcare groups

*Indigenous Fire Knowledge Project*

and

### East Gippsland Network of Neighbourhood Houses and Centre for Rural Communities

*East Gippsland Building*

*Community Resilience*

## COMMUNITY-LED PREVENTION AND PREPAREDNESS (INDUSTRY)

### Wimmera Catchment Management Authority

*Wimmera Fire Prevention Partnership*

and

### South Gippsland Shire Council

*Working as one in South Gippsland!*

## EDUCATION

### Anglesea Primary School

*Anglesea fire education initiative – Survive and Thrive Program*

## FIRE SERVICES AWARD FOR LOCAL-LED PREVENTION AND PREPAREDNESS

### CFA Diamond Creek Brigade

*New Parents' Safety Program*

## FIRE SERVICES AWARD FOR PARTNERSHIP

### CFA

*Voluntary Grain Harvesting Guide – Trial 2014-15*

## FIRE SERVICES AWARD FOR A PROJECT OF STATE SIGNIFICANCE

### MFB

*Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) Project*

## INNOVATION AND DESIGN

### SEM Fire and Rescue

*Medium Pumper*

## MEDIA

### Katherine Towers, The Australian

*Fire risk caused by the use of non-compliant building products*

## RECOVERY (INDUSTRY)

### Macedon Shire Ranges Council

*Black Hill Reserve Fire Recovery*

## RECOVERY (COMMUNITY)

### South West Goulburn Landcare Network

*Community fire recovery initiative*

and

### South West Goulburn Landcare Network and Upper Maribyrnong Catchment Landcare Group

*Landcare-led recovery after 2014 Mickleham-Kilmore fires*

## BA replacement enters next phase

The Respiratory Protection Replacement Project (RPRP) will soon be replacing self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) systems at CFA, MFB, Ambulance Victoria, Victoria Police and other state government agencies, including Corrections Victoria.

Stage 1 of the project – procurement of new SCBA cylinders – is well underway, with a contract already signed for Dräger Pacific Safety to supply around 7,000 new 6.8 litre breathing air cylinders.

All agencies in the project will use the same cylinders. MFB has already received them and is now using them.

As the RPRP moves into Stage 2 – procurement of new breathing apparatus sets – tender arrangements are well underway. Specifications for the breathing apparatus sets were finalised following a multi-agency consultation process and further consultation with key stakeholders including our members.

The tender for the new breathing apparatus sets will be released through the Victorian Government Tenders System website.

When the new breathing apparatus sets are purchased, CFA will switch to the new cylinders and new breathing apparatus sets at the same time.

STORY CHRISTOPHER STILL



PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

## Priorities for the Volunteerism Strategy

In 2011, His Honour David Jones completed his report *Inquiry into the Effect of Arrangements made by CFA on its Volunteers*. CFA has since been working on a range of activities to address the recommendations from this report.

Some of the work completed to date, which has directly benefited volunteers, includes:

- publication of the Statewide Operational Training Guide
- updates to the Brigade Operational Skills Profile tool
- creation of the Member Roles Pathways Map
- the launch of the Recruit Training Program (which replaced the Minimum Skills Program)
- Recognition of Prior Learning member kits
- Stage 2 of the new Sunraysia Training Campus at Mildura
- upgrades to training campuses across the state.

Since the Jones Inquiry, CFA has created a network of five organisational strategies – People, Volunteerism, Service Delivery, Finance and Assets. These strategies support CFA's *Business Strategy 2013-18: Towards Resilience* and help to set CFA's future direction.

“Our focus is now on ensuring that any future work to improve support to volunteers is aligned to CFA's strategic priorities,” said Acting Executive Director Learning and Volunteerism Kate Harrap.

Following consultation with VFBV, our priorities under the Volunteerism Strategy for 2015-16 will be to:

- develop a Volunteer Support Model to improve support for volunteerism
- establish a grassroots Volunteer Leadership and Management Development Program
- contribute to strategic planning and development of volunteerism on a sector-wide basis
- develop and implement targeted youth programs.

Kate said that delivering on these important priorities will encourage, maintain and strengthen the capacity of volunteers.

“We have learned a lot from the Jones Inquiry and other recent inquiries and reviews. The legacy of Jones will help to guide the delivery of organisational priorities under CFA's network of five strategies,” Kate said.

STORY ERIC COLLIER

## Fire Services Review

The Fire Services Review was handed to the Victorian Government on 19 October, following consultation, analysis and research

by review author David O'Byrne. The review was asked to make recommendations about the resourcing, operations, management and culture of CFA and MFB.

There were 180 submissions, more than a third of which were made confidentially. The submissions will be published online after the Fire Services Review is released publicly.

# Going up with the FLOs

Fire lookout observers (FLOs) play a crucial role in spotting fires and passing on information to fire agencies. All stories by Leith Hillard.



## Howling gales and lightning strikes don't worry Robert

**Orbost brigade member Robert Gaudion spends an average of 80 days each summer about 20 metres halfway up a Telstra tower which doubles as DELWP's Mt Raymond fire tower. Last season he reported six fires across four months, working eight-hour days through the holiday season, when fire danger is high or lightning is predicted. He also overlooks local controlled burns in autumn.**

With his only audience the occasional wedged-tail eagle, glossy black red-tailed cockatoos and needle-tailed swifts from Siberia, he's been known to operate in his jocks on days when the temperature sits near 40 degrees.

"I also have a solar shower and take up weights and a skipping rope to keep me alert and break the routine," said Robert.

Otherwise retired, Robert has been in this paid position for 10 years. He and the Mt Buck observer cooperate to ensure they each get two days off every fortnight while they watch each other's territory.

Robert has seen helicopters filling at Marlo and flying past, sometimes mightily battling the winds. On a good day he can see oil rigs offshore, the Point Hicks lighthouse 63 kilometres away, and the Mt Bemm, Mt Nowa Nowa and Mt Ellery tower 38 kilometres away above Goongerah are usually in sight.

"I got in at 8am on the mid-January day in 2014 when lightning strikes went through and started the fire at Jacksons Crossing, but was sent home after an hour. It was just too close," said Robert.

"On Black Saturday it was 30 degrees by 9am and the wind was howling. Mt Tassie tower was burnt out that day but nothing started in our landscape.

"Mt Buck, Mt Nowa Nowa and I all spotted the Tostaree fire in February 2011. It was a reignition of an October burnoff that burned in the roots before coming out on a bad day.

"The farmland is never 100 per cent cured but the tea tree scrub on the Marlo Plains is a risk."

Any fire spotted is called into the DELWP duty officer via the landline. Robert gets its bearings using a fixed vertical string on 180 degrees south and 360 degrees north, lining it up with the compass bearings marked around the walls, then getting a grid reference from other towers.

"We might see an inversion layer where a column of smoke goes up then a wind change comes through and changes the smoke's direction," said Robert. "We see fog dogs when fog comes out of the bush after thunderstorms and you have to separate it from smoke. I've been here in 100 kilometre an hour winds and lightning strikes on the tower. You have to make sure you let go and jump off the bottom rung of the ladder so you are earthed."

And, finally, in the great Australian tradition, a dunny story. When Mt Raymond tower was burned out in the 1980s, "The tower observer had to tip the dunny over his head to save his life," said Robert.



PHOTOS: LEITH HILLARD

# Powered by tea and Scotch Fingers

**On a grassy hill past cows sits CFA's Mt Warrnambool fire tower.**

District 5 Headquarters brigade member Bob Frost has volunteered there as a fire lookout observer an average of 20 days each summer since 1998.

When asked about the specialist skills required, 82-year-old Bob insisted "it's just hands-on learning, knowing your local roads and conditions.

"You'll tend to get fire coming in from the north-northwest with a westerly predominant in the morning. Come afternoon, the wind is likely to change around to the west and they try to stay on the west of a fire.

"I call any fire via landline into Vic Fire and the Warrnambool ICC. I might also call the group secretary and they will come back to me on the radio asking for a weather reading."

Powered by tea, sandwiches and Scotch Fingers, Bob's lookout system centres on a revolving chair, a pair of binoculars and a plumb-bob marking the tower on a large horizontal map. He gets behind the plumb-bob to line up a fire with the compass points around the tops of the windows. Its position is triangulated when a second tower takes a bearing with the fire pinpointed where the two bearings cross.

A fixed string and pin system then locate it on the map, and milk bottle tops marked 'fire' and 'dust' distinguish incidents already called in from dust raised.

The tower is surrounded by irrigated agricultural land but Bob also has an eagle eye on Framlingham Forest, the largest nearby risk. Wickliffe, Derrinallum and the ocean are as far as the eye can see.

The tower regularly communicates with other nearby fire towers including Mt Pondan (which looks to the Otways), Mt Rouse and Mt Dundas respectively 49, 61 and 83 kilometres away.



PHOTOS: LEITH HILLARD

PHOTO: COURTESY OF SHEPPARTON NEWS



## Eagle eyes on risk

**Geoff Broughton is ready for his 24th season up DELWP's Mt Wombat fire tower in the Strathbogies. One and a half years into the captaincy of Branjee Fire Brigade, he's learned to juggle his volunteer and paid roles, committing up to 100 days a season to the tower.**

"I've spotted fires in the tower then attended them to mop up after I've knocked off," said Geoff. "Once I'm off the tower I'm a CFA person."

Geoff looks down on the risk presented by the Strathbogie State Forest, the lower Goulburn from Nagambie to Nathalia, and the Rubicon forest.

"I can observe my circle of vision in 20 seconds," continued Geoff, "and do a really good look in under a minute. You've got to be alert. I believe in a sixth sense. You get in tune with the weather and when the FDI is over 50 it's a don't-read-the-paper day.

"In the early 2000s I saw the Tatong fire spotting ahead. With the 2006 alpine fires, I saw from on high how fast it moved.

"Black Saturday was the worst. I heard Mt Hickey report the Kilmore fire which is 90 kilometres from me and I could see smoke within 10 minutes. In the afternoon Murrindindi was spotted by Mt Despair and again I saw it about 10 minutes later."

Geoff also looked down on the great work done by CFA, DELWP and aircraft when the Creightons Creek fire flared last Christmas Day.

"The bad thing was they hadn't had their Christmas dinner," he said, "but the good thing was that everyone was home and responded so quickly."



PHOTOS: OWEN GOODING

# Burning lessons for conservation



**A partnership between CFA and Trust for Nature is providing brigades with opportunities to hone their controlled burn skills while conserving endangered flora and fauna.**

Now in their second year, the autumn burns have focused on a quarter of the 10,000 hectares of the Patho Plains owned by Trust for Nature. This land extends from south of Echuca to south of Swan Hill and down to Wedderburn. The rich soil is naturally productive for grazing and cropping so there's little native grassland left.

CFA's Biodiversity Adviser Justine Leahy helped initiate the partnership.

"Each burn will be part of a five-year rotation cycle based on ecological requirements," said Justine. "Without caring for the quality of the grassland through grazing and burning, threatened flora and fauna that relies on it will decline and be lost."

Threatened flora includes the Red Swainson-pea and the Slender Darling-pea, while fauna includes the Plains-wanderer which nests on the ground, and the Hooded Scaly-foot.

"It was estimated that Plains-wanderer numbers had declined by 94 per cent since the 2011 floods," continued Justine, "but we hope it will return within two to three years when the habitat structure of the burned grasslands will be ideal. They should breed up fairly quickly after that."

In 2014, brigades from as far afield as Ferntree Gully, Seville, Bayswater and Hillcrest gained hands-on experience in grassland fire alongside local members. The 2015 burns close to Kinypanial conducted by four brigades covered 150 hectares in one day.

The plan for autumn 2016 is two to three days of burning, aiming for 350 to 500 hectares.

While volunteers close to the burn area will be first in line for the burning opportunity, other interested brigades statewide should approach their group officer and discuss participation.

"We will continue to encourage brigades from other areas to participate," said Justine. "This is an ideal opportunity for brigades training and mentoring new members and we urge them to consider applying."

STORY LEITH HILLARD

# CFA wins award for truck safety



A major upgrade of safety systems and equipment to more than 1,000 CFA tankers has won a prestigious safety award.

In mid-September, former Chief Officer Euan Ferguson accepted the Australasian Fleet Management Association 2015 Fleet Safety Award in Sydney. The award recognises excellence in the management of vehicle fleets and improved safety.

CFA won the award for its Crew Protection Retrofit Program which retrofitted trucks to protect crews in a burnover situation. Features include radiant heat curtains, water-spraying systems, heat-shielding panels and upgraded intercom communication systems.

Euan said it was an honour to receive the Fleet Safety Award.

“This award is based on hard-won lessons learned. We must never forget that the catalyst for this safety system was the tragic loss of five volunteer firefighters from Geelong West, who lost their lives while fighting the Linton bushfire in 1998,” Euan said.

“Many of today’s safety procedures and engineering designs were developed as part of CFA’s response to this tragedy. In some ways, this award should be dedicated to those who lost their lives during the Linton fire.



Euan Ferguson and Manager Fleet Maintenance Danny Jones with the award

PHOTOS: KEITH PAKENHAM

“Winning an award for the safety of our fleet proves the success of the program and is very rewarding for everyone involved, particularly our mechanical officers who worked tirelessly to fit out all the trucks.”

CFA tankers built before 2006 received the enhanced crew protection systems. All tankers produced after 2006 have this protection as a standard feature.

Western Australia fire services are now in the process of using CFA’s designs to fit crew protection systems to their fleet.

STORY AMY SCHILDBERGER

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# The value of Community Fireguard

**In its 22-year history, CFA's Community Fireguard (CFG) Program has notched up some special achievements.**

At its launch in 1993, the program helped pioneer what we now call 'shared responsibility', by encouraging groups of neighbours to get together and take responsibility for the bushfire risk in their own backyards.

A study published in the International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction has placed a dollar figure on CFG's value to the community: \$732,747 per CFG group in predicted savings from reduced property loss.

John Gilbert of CFA's Knowledge and Evidence team and Angela Cook and Catherine Nelsson of CFA's Community Development team developed the study with population health academics from the University of Melbourne and health economists from Deakin University.

John said many of the program's benefits were already well known, particularly those involving preparedness. What was missing were some of the economic and social costs and benefits.

"This study shows that community safety programs have the potential to deliver significant social and economic benefit," said John.

The report states: "Totaled over 10 years, the cost per Fireguard group for the program is \$10,844 (with a range of \$2,697-\$19,071) and in the event of a major bushfire the predicted savings from property loss [per group] is \$732,747."

At the household level, the study drew on previous findings from Black Saturday experiences, which calculated that CFG participation compared to no participation reduced the risk of property loss from 35 per cent to 21 per cent.

John Gilbert said studies of this type were a model for the future.

"With increasing demand for resources, we need to demonstrate the effectiveness and value of our programs. This type of study provides a stronger evidence base from which to base resource allocation decisions."

STORY PAUL HUGGETT



PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM



PHOTO: CHARLOTTE CANNAN

## Fire Action Week goes back in time

**To celebrate Fire Action Week, Sovereign Hill showcased 1800s' firefighting equipment and techniques in an interactive display by CFA volunteers during the first week of November.**

Highlighting just how far firefighting has changed in 150 years, the display featured the humble beginnings when horse-drawn fire engines and manual water pumps were seen as state of the art. Brigades from District 15 also demonstrated the equipment and techniques used to fight fires in the 1800s.

CFA District 15 Acting Operations Manager Gavin Hope said the display would not only be a chance to reflect on how far firefighting has evolved, but to recognise the commitment of CFA's members who've worked tirelessly to protect their communities for the past 150 years.

"Keeping in the theme of Fire Action Week, and just ahead of the Fire Danger Period, this was a great opportunity for our members to engage in meaningful conversations with community members about how they can keep themselves, their families and homes safe from fire this summer," Gavin said.

One of CFA's mobile education buses was also on display at Sovereign Hill.

Fire Action Week was officially launched by Minister for Emergency Services Jane Garrett in Endeavour Hills, where residents on Melbourne's urban fringe learned about the local fire risks and how to take action to improve their safety and the safety of their neighbours over summer.

STORY ALYSSIA MORISON

# Learning from incidents

## Interface firefighting

**Fire service personnel are often challenged with the complexities of transitioning from aggressive direct attack to defensive firefighting strategies such as interface firefighting, sometimes without notice or planning.**

Over the past few years, there have been several fires where firefighters had to shift their focus to protecting homes on the urban interface or in remote areas. Generally, this has happened because of rapidly-changing weather conditions and extreme fire behaviour. At times, crews are exposed to risks while protecting assets, so it's important to have a good understanding of the strategies needed to remain safe and also effective.

It's predicted that this season's lack of rain and El Nino weather pattern will mean firefighters will need to use interface strategies.

The state control priorities for interface firefighting give a clear priority to safety and information, but the remaining priorities should also be considered.

- The protection and preservation of life is paramount. This includes the safety of emergency service personnel and community members including vulnerable community members and visitors in the incident area.
- The issuing of community information and community warnings about the incident which are timely, relevant and tailored to enable community members to make informed decisions about their safety.
- Protection of critical infrastructure and community assets which support community resilience.
- Protection of residential property.
- Protection of assets supporting individual livelihoods and economic production which supports individual and community financial sustainability.
- Protection of environmental and conservation assets which consider the culture, biodiversity and social values of the environment.

Given the rapid development of fires burning into interface areas, there's often little time to develop detailed plans or deploy enough resources to protect entire communities. The use of intent-based operational decision-making is vital to ensure fireground leaders prioritise tasks to achieve the best results.

### WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT INTERFACE FIRES?

Interface fires evolve from bushland fuels to impact on the built environment. The interface refers to the bushland/urban location – whether semi-rural, peri-urban, or urban – where the built environment impacts on bushland. Interface fires are transitional, moving between bushland vegetation and the built environment, often in a short time. Procedures used to combat bushfires may not be successful in interface locations, so new strategies and tactics specifically for this type of emergency are required. They don't replace bushfire strategies, but provide a mixture of structural, urban and rural defensive options, where required, with the flexibility to quickly become offensive and change back again.

The Victorian Fire Risk Register – Bushfire (VFRR-B) is a multi-agency, systematic approach to recognise assets in communities that are at risk from bush and grassfire within each municipal area of Victoria. Assets include residential areas, schools, hospitals, roads, rails, transmissions, agriculture, tourist sites, and areas of environmental and cultural significance.

The output maps of the VFRR-B are helpful to identify the communities at risk within the interface areas of Victoria. Your district will be able to provide guidance on local communities and assets at risk which have been identified on the VFRR-B.

Following a review of interface strategies, Australia adopted a national approach to terminology and strategies and Fire & Rescue NSW produced the Interface Zone Manual. Below, we explain the terminology and strategies used in the manual.

### INTERFACE ZONES

There are four categories of interface zones and each may need a different approach to firefighting.

- **Classic interface** occurs when structures are built close to or are surrounded by bushland, and include a large number of homes, cars, power poles, utilities and residents. This can be any area featuring estates or built areas abutting or within bushland. Control efforts can involve many strike teams protecting multiple assets from safe, defensible roadside locations.
- **Closed or occluded interface** consists of isolated areas of bushland within an urban area. These may be best described as bushland parks surrounded by houses or other structures. Control efforts may vary due to the finite amount of fuel or quick external extinguishment while protecting surrounding assets.
- **Mixed interface** consists of isolated structures not close to each other, but surrounded by larger areas of vegetation. These may be rural properties in grassland and bushland. They can be resource hungry and need to be protected by one truck per property.
- **Multiple ignition zone** (fuel corridors) are large housing estates not close to large areas of vegetation, but have the potential to be impacted by embers remote from the fire front. Metropolitan regions with vegetation corridors close to housing can lead to structure-to-structure ignitions.

### IDENTIFYING DEFENDABLE ASSETS THROUGH RISK ASSESSMENT

Structure triage for the interface zone classifies structures into groups based on whether they can be successfully and safely defended. In a deteriorating fire situation, decisions must be made about how to use limited resources to keep firefighters safe and protect the greatest amount of life and property. Interface firefighting is focused on defensive protection of threatened structures and can be classified according to the resources required to protect them in the worst-case fire.

- **Defendable** classified structures require little protection and few or no resources will be required to protect them.
- **Active intervention** classified structures need protection and can be saved by committing moderate resources.
- **Undefendable** classified structures will be difficult to save and need numerous resources. There may be insufficient defendable space or extreme fire behaviour.

Base your decisions on what is the greatest potential and probable threat to the structure; firefighter safety; timing of the fire; what you can do with the available resources; the characteristics of the structure and its risk areas for ignition; surrounding fuels (bush or grass); and fire behaviour and intensity.

Difficult decisions may have to be made in triaging structures and classifying them as No Go or Go. Factors that may lead you to consider a structure as a No Go may include:

- water supply will not last as long as the threat
- the fire intensity dictates leaving the area immediately
- the fire is making a sustained run
- the structure's roof is one-quarter or more alight
- fire is inside the structure or windows are broken.

The impact on properties depends on wind, radiant heat, flame impingement, ember attack, spotting, direct ember impact to structures, fuel linking and structure-to-structure spread. A defensible space around an asset helps mitigate these effects and it's important to concentrate on measures that prevent ignition within a 30-metre area around the asset.

## VEHICLE RESOURCE NEEDS FOR STRUCTURAL FIRE PROTECTION

### SINGLE STRUCTURES/HOMES

- For separated structures surrounded mainly with bush fuels: one truck per structure.
- For continuous single structures less than 15 metres apart: one truck per two structures.
- One additional truck for every five trucks assigned to specific structures, to float in between.

### CLUSTERS OF 20 OR MORE HOMES UP TO 15 METRES APART

- The number of single trucks needed equals the number of homes on the perimeter divided by four, plus one additional truck.
- Provide an additional truck if the roofs are combustible.

A protection plan should be developed to disperse the trucks across the area, based on the configuration of assets under threat.

The triaging of assets based on community critical infrastructure should also be included. However, this will generally be set by the incident controller in consultation with the Emergency Management Team (EMT). This may focus on hospitals, energy supplies or places of mass congregation, though at times you may be diverted from the fire front to adopt interface strategies to protect isolated properties or communities.

The control structure on the fireground must be clearly understood during this dynamic period to ensure there's a strong level of supervision and communication during the tasking. Reviews of previous incidents show an increased number of safety-related incidents during these operations because of crew limitations in situational awareness and understanding of the control structure. It's extremely important to understand the fire behaviour and reporting lines when fully engaged in the asset protection.

## EFFECTIVE PROTECTION OF ASSETS IN THE INTERFACE ZONE

The periods before, during and after the impact need to be considered to effectively protect assets. The following questions should be considered.

- What key asset protection strategies and associated triggers have been planned for, based on Fire Danger Index (FDI), firefighter safety, and structural triage and resourcing?
- Using LACES and a dynamic risk assessment, are your resources and personnel suitable for the task?
- What is the authorisation (incident controller) and incident action plan (IAP) for the fire? Without authority, are you confident with operational intent principles for your circumstances?
- Does the asset have an effective and safe defensible space for the crews? Has the owner/occupier carried out preparatory works to protect the asset/s?
- Within the IAP, could some form of offensive strategy be adopted if conditions improve and would greater protection benefits arise from attacking the fire instead?
- Is there an ability to contact crews, send regular situation reports and maintain command and control in the event of communication loss?

Pre-impact structure and site preparation will involve an assessment to identify all items that may compromise the asset during ember attack, including ignition or entry points such as door mats, garden furniture, firewood, plants and mulch, shade cloth, dog kennels/beds, etc. If possible, portable items should be moved inside or to a safer area. Move cars into garages or to lower-risk areas.

Close all windows, doors, vents, garage doors and block spaces beneath doors with damp towels or blankets. Remove curtains and move furniture away from fire side windows, fill the bath and sinks with water, use mops and buckets and wet towels. Access the internal roof space manhole to monitor for embers and fire. Always have a second means of escape from the leeward side of the structure.

Leave power and lights turned on and doors unlocked, turn off air-conditioning and fans, shut off gas and remove cylinders from the fire side of the structure, put up a ladder on the sheltered side of the structure to access any fires on the roof, clear the roof and gutters of any vegetation, then block and fill with water.

### SET UP YOUR ZONE

- Determine two escape routes and two safe refuge areas and brief the crew on emergency procedures in the event of retreat
- Reverse the truck into the driveway or sheltered side of structure
- Leave the engine running and lights on
- Lay hose lines to protect structure. The suggested method is two 38mm lines of two lengths each either side of the structure to a maximum of 60 metres
- Place a ladder on the leeward side against the structure for spot fires
- Locate spotting zone and conservatively only extinguish spot fires or fires within defensible space
- Use a roaming water tanker for spot fires or static water supply with portable pump for filling tankers
- Designate the pump operator as safety officer.

## DEFENCE STRATEGIES

When structural triage has been completed, one of three defence strategies must be adopted by firefighting crews.

**Ember defence** is used when the approaching line of fire is too intense to be suppressed by offensive means and is producing significant ember attack. It involves extinguishing small fires that occur in and around structures. Firefighters operate from safe positions behind suitable shielding, structures, within a defensible space or safe anchor point. This may be achieved by placing adequate space between you and the main fire front, such as the street or house behind the impacted line.

**Line defence** is used when conditions would normally allow offensive attack strategies (the fire is not too intense and flame heights are low-to-moderate) but there are not enough trucks to mount an offensive attack in time. It involves preventing the line of fire from closely approaching or impacting the property.

This can also be achieved using ground or roof monitors on pumpers with reticulated water supply to build a wet control line across gullies; natural bushland areas in residential areas; coverage of a structure in a curtain of water; along roadsides or wick reserves; or by applying foam.

A **backstop defence** is used when there's no safe defensible space around structures and/or the approaching fire is too intense and firefighters cannot safely protect the structures during the impact of fire. Firefighters and vehicles must withdraw temporarily a short distance away to a suitable refuge (anchor point) with the intention of returning after the fire passes. This safe area may be one street back or from a staging point. After the main front subsides, they move forward to put out spot ignitions and properties on fire. This type of defence is used when firefighters have run out of other options and is purely defensive.

## TACTICS FOR ALL THREE DEFENSIVE STRATEGIES

Command and control must include SMEACS briefings, and preferred positioning and make-up of vehicles and crews in strike teams or single resources. Encourage a fall-back and regrouping position in the event of major communication failure and separation of resources.

- The interface area must align with the delegated command and control structure using the span of control.
- Ensure ground observers or fireground commanders maintain pace with the moving front within the interface and provide regular situation reports up the chain of command.
- Air attack may supplement the interface strategies and tactics.
- Use private fire units on scene if safe to do so.
- Appropriate vehicles for the task should be planned for in advance and reviewed during the fire. This may be a mix of urban pumpers and structure-trained crews for structure protection in streets and clusters, and tankers and slip-on units for dealing with the main fire and spot outbreaks. This is especially important for responses that include other agencies such as DELWP and MFB.



Ember defence



Line defence



Backstop defence

# Fonterra Stanhope factory fire

## SUMMARY

Stanhope is a small dairy farming community in northern Victoria in District 20. The Fonterra Stanhope factory is one of the largest milk processing factories in Victoria, producing a range of specialty cheeses. In 2012, \$6.5 million was invested to upgrade the site to keep up with demand. On 16 December 2014, a large fire damaged the roof of the cheese plant which could have had significant economic and social implications for the community.

## INCIDENT OVERVIEW

At 12.30am on 16 December 2014 a fire was reported at Fonterra Stanhope. The site was immediately evacuated with all personnel accounted for and no one injured. Fire trucks from Stanhope, Tatura, Cohuna, Echuca, Girgarre, Kyabram, Rochester and Rushworth brigades attended the fire, plus the ladder platform and PE van from Bendigo and the Shepparton hazmat vehicle.

The fire was contained by 4am and crews remained at the scene for some time to identify any remaining hotspots using thermal imaging cameras. Fire investigators attended at 9am to determine the cause.

The investigation found the fire was caused by a failure of compressor switchboard components as a result of an electrical storm that hit the area causing a number of power interruptions. There was significant damage externally and internally, with the roof collapsing over the compressor room and cheese room.

The damage disrupted two plants for two shifts and directly affected 20 employees, however the plant was able to return to production relatively quickly. There was no effect on the 260 farmers who supplied milk to the site because the milk was redirected to other parts of the Fonterra supply network.

## LESSONS IDENTIFIED

**Importance of pre-plan for premises** The brigade regularly attended the site and was familiar with the layout. The preparation of pre-plans benefited all parties at the incident, and helped build an understanding of the facility which minimised the damage to the property.

**Prompt dispatch** The immediate dispatch of multiple brigades to the incident contributed to an effective initial attack which limited damage.

**Fire safety system** The knowledge (from the pre-plan) that the site had numerous tanks to compensate for poor town water flow and pressure meant the firefighters had adequate water.

**Notification of fire** There was no monitored fire alarm system, but the emergency plan dictated early notification of the fire to Triple Zero.

**Escalations based on fire/chemical risk** The fire was very difficult to fight. Firefighters had to constantly be aware of the ammonia gas that was on the premises. Hand-held ammonia gas detectors were used by the firefighters.

**Communication** Links with key personnel at all levels were crucial and successful during and after the incident. The relationship between CFA and Fonterra greatly helped all those involved to understand the risks and develop a plan to recover quickly.

## CONCLUSION

This incident was a team effort which included numerous brigades and Fonterra staff. Although there was substantial damage, the good work from all those involved contained the fire to one section of the facility which allowed production to continue at full capacity, and minimised the economic impact on the community.

The potential impact of this fire on the local community was well understood and is a great example of working as one within the community.



# Stay in the loop

The best way to keep in touch with the latest news about CFA is to jump online and check out the news section of our website and our Facebook page especially for CFA members.

On our News & Media website ([news.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://news.cfa.vic.gov.au)) you'll find all the latest CFA-related stories from around Victoria, including posts by brigade members about incidents, training, events, celebrations, awards, new station openings, fundraising and much more. We recently redesigned the website to make it easier to use.

This website isn't owned by staff at headquarters but by all CFA members – any CFA member can upload stories and photos to it. To post stories you first need to register: click on 'Contribute' at [news.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://news.cfa.vic.gov.au), then click on 'Don't have an account?'

Every fortnight, a CFA News Update email is sent to around 23,000 CFA volunteers and all staff, with links to the top stories featured on News & Media over the previous two weeks. It's a great way to keep in touch without having to check the website all the time. If you'd like to receive this email, go to Brigades Online/CFA Online ([cfaonline.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://cfaonline.cfa.vic.gov.au)) click on 'Update your Details' and enter your email address. You'll then automatically be added to the News Update email, which you can cancel at any time by unsubscribing in 'Update your Details'. If you don't yet have a login for Brigades Online, your new password will be emailed to you as soon as you register on the login page.

Keeping your email details up to date in Brigades Online also means you can receive email updates from the CEO and Chief Officer and important safety warnings.

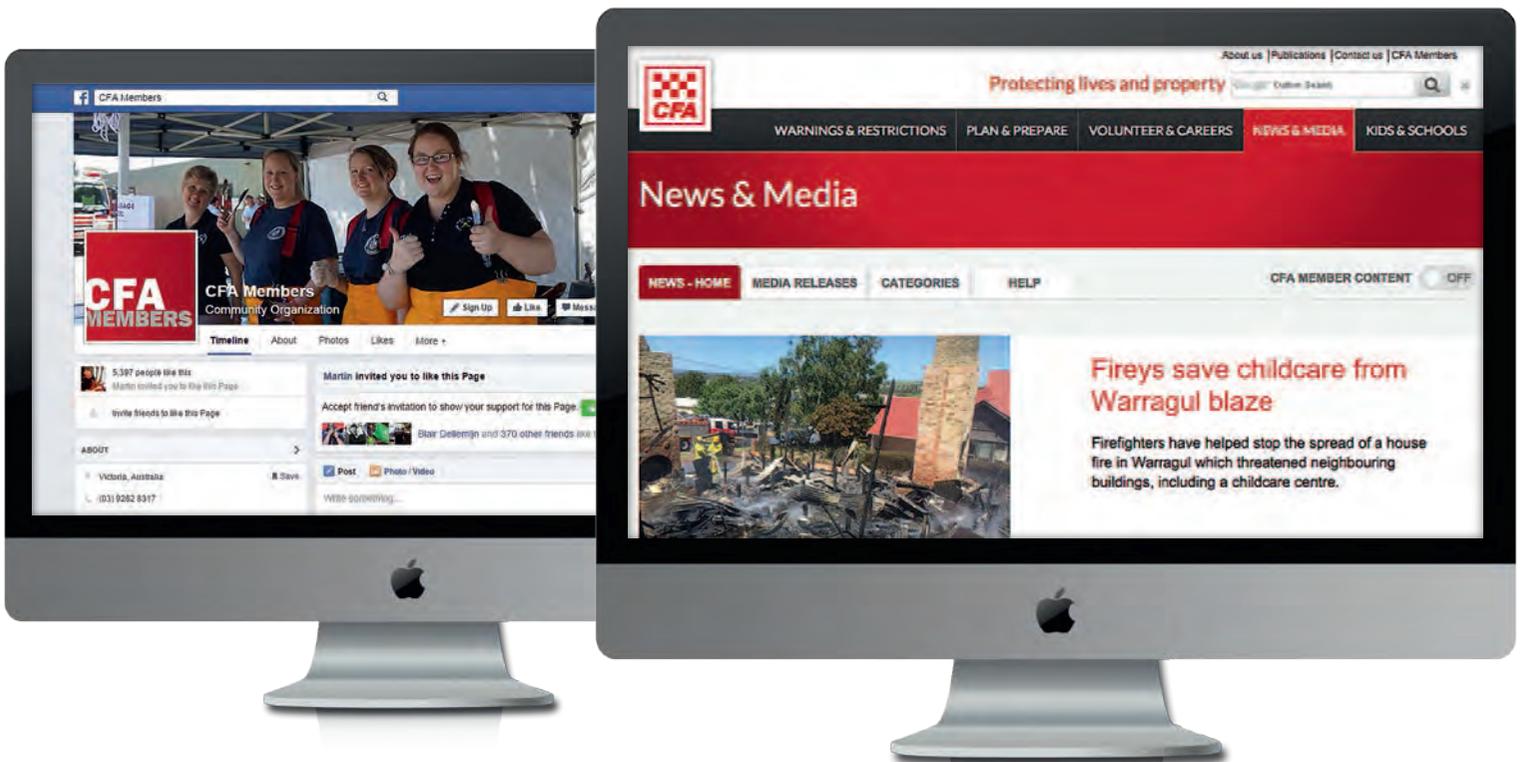
If you already read the latest CFA stories on the News & Media website, we encourage you to cancel your paper copy of *Brigade* magazine and read the online emag instead ([cfa.vic.gov.au/brigademag](http://cfa.vic.gov.au/brigademag)). This digital version of the magazine is easy to navigate and includes embedded video and pop-up images. It's usually online a week before the paper copy is mailed.

To cancel your paper copy, go to Brigades Online/CFA Online and click on 'Update your Details', then select 'Manage subscriptions' from the Menu tab. Under 'Brigade Magazine', make sure the 'Hard copy' box is unticked.

On [facebook.com/cfamembers](http://facebook.com/cfamembers), you'll find up-to-date posts about CFA news and events and a range of diverse stories about brigades. More than 300 brigades have their own facebook page to share information with their communities and CFA members. When you post interesting stories or brigade achievements and initiatives on your Facebook page, think about also posting them on the CFA News & Media website to share with all CFA members.

If you plan to launch a brigade Facebook page, you can join the CFA social media managers' Facebook page ([facebook.com/groups/cfasocial](http://facebook.com/groups/cfasocial)). This is a forum where members who run their brigade Facebook pages can ask for or offer help, and chat about how to improve their Facebook pages.

STORY DUNCAN RUSSELL





## CFA reminds residents to clear vegetation

**A new online tool was launched in October on CFA's website to make it easier for residents to check whether they can clear vegetation, including trees and branches, from around their homes.**

Clearing vegetation around your home is important to give it the best possible chance of surviving a bushfire.

CFA members are encouraged to spread the word among their communities that in most areas outside Melbourne a permit isn't needed to remove trees within 10 metres of their home and understorey vegetation for up to 30 metres from their homes.

Planning exemptions – known as the '10/30' and '10/50' rules – were introduced in 2011 to reduce red tape for residents wanting to clear up ahead of the bushfire season.

Former Chief Officer Euan Ferguson said that in many communities these rules were not widely known or understood.

"We're concerned that some residents may be putting off essential property preparation work because they think a permit is needed, and it all goes into the too-hard basket," he said.

"For people living in most areas of regional Victoria and in high bushfire risk areas especially, that is not usually the case."

A new short video 'Clear up or clear out' was released on CFA's Facebook and YouTube pages to raise awareness of the rules around vegetation clearing. View it at [cfa.vic.gov.au/clearing](http://cfa.vic.gov.au/clearing).

Despite its lighthearted tone, the video has a serious message urging residents to check before they clear by going to [cfa.vic.gov.au/clearing](http://cfa.vic.gov.au/clearing) and by talking to their local council.

For more information about the 10/30 and 10/50 rules, and to check which rules may apply to your area, visit [cfa.vic.gov.au/clearing](http://cfa.vic.gov.au/clearing) or call the Victorian Bushfire Information Line on 1800 240 667.

STORY SONIA MACLEAN

## Blue Ribbon Day is for CFA too

**Scoresby Fire Brigade firefighter Jim Read believes the great camaraderie between the emergency services shines through on days such as Blue Ribbon Day, 29 September. Blue Ribbon Day is a day for police members to remember colleagues who have died in the line of duty.**

Jim compares the day – which is especially meaningful to the hundreds of CFA firefighters who are also police members – to CFA's firefighter memorial service.

"Everyone understands what we do is dangerous," said Jim, explaining why such occasions carried such resonance with front line responders – whichever colour, hat or tabard they wear.

Jim, who's now retired from the police force, is a 30-year stalwart of Scoresby brigade and has experienced the death of several police colleagues, many in car accidents.

"Blue Ribbon Day has always been important to me. It's a day to reflect, to think 'there but for the grace of God go I'."

He believes the connection between emergency services is now much closer than ever before. "It's not 'your job' or 'my job' any more. We work together," he said.

He feels fortunate to be one of those people in both camps and able to contribute to what he calls "cross-pollination". For example, when attending incidents as a brigade member, Jim's training lets him identify suspicious signs at an incident that warrant police involvement.

A few years ago, Victoria Police asked Jim to rewrite the emergency manual to fit in with AIIMS, the Australia-wide incident management framework.

"VicPol gave me that role because of my experience," he said. "It was about making sure we were all singing from the same hymn book. Getting the same structures in place has allowed us to all dovetail and get the job done."

STORY SONIA MACLEAN



## Improving the safety of dangerous goods sites

**CFA's Dangerous Goods Unit (DGU) in Fire & Emergency Management aims to continually improve firefighter safety by making sure sites that store and handle dangerous goods adhere to the Dangerous Goods Regulations and relevant Australian Standards.**

Industrial and commercial sites storing large quantities of dangerous goods have to get the written advice of the fire services under the *Dangerous Goods (Storage and Handling) Regulations 2012*.

"When we attend a dangerous goods site, we assess the fire protection system and emergency management plans, and ensure that issues related to dangerous goods and response are addressed on site," said Senior Dangerous Goods Officer Matt Allen.

"We work closely with WorkSafe, MFB and industry to achieve a higher level of firefighter safety than may otherwise exist."

The DGU visits major hazard facilities, food production sites, water treatment plants and manufacturing facilities throughout the country area of Victoria.

"If your brigade attends a site for a familiarisation visit or post-incident investigation and identifies concerns related to dangerous goods

storage and handling or emergency planning, please get in touch. It may be that the emergency management plan is out of date or fire protection equipment is obstructed. We can take steps to ensure that the site is compliant."

The northern catchment area of Geelong, which includes Corio and the growth area of Lara, has the highest growth of industrial risk in country Victoria. It includes five major hazard facilities, two prisons, a major aerodrome, a busy bay port, major industry and critical infrastructure.

Operations Officer Pat Geary is the northern catchment officer.

"I'm working closely with the DGU to form relationships with premises to ensure all risk is recognised, analysed and mitigated," said Pat. "I make a commitment to the premises that CFA will work in partnership for the mutual benefit of the premises, CFA and the community."

If you have concerns about the storage and handling of dangerous goods and the implications for firefighter safety in your brigade's area, phone the DGU on 9262 8865 or email [dangerousgoodsunit@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:dangerousgoodsunit@cfa.vic.gov.au).

STORY JENNIFER BLYTH

## Tackling the risk of tyre stockpiles

**In 2012-13, almost 50,000 tonnes of waste tyres (around six million car tyres) were stockpiled or dumped in Victoria. Whole tyres are flammable and, when stored in large volumes, can create a fire hazard.**

When ignited, a tyre fire is difficult to extinguish and it causes significant environmental, social and economic costs. In the absence of regulation, Victoria has become an attractive dumping ground, leading to numerous orphan sites across the state by failed entrepreneurs.

To protect Victorians from the fire risk associated with inappropriately-managed tyre stockpiles, the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) introduced new legal requirements for storing waste tyres in April 2015. Existing and new sites that store more than 40 tonnes or 5,000 equivalent passenger units (EPU) of whole tyres need an EPA works approval before they are built or modified, as well as an EPA licence to operate.

These requirements will also help support legitimate and sustainable waste tyre recycling opportunities in Victoria.

A site storing 5,000 EPU could have 5,000 car tyres, 10,000 motorcycle tyres, 1,000 truck tyres or a mix of tyres that equates to 5,000 EPU. To report a site that appears to be storing more than 5,000 EPU, contact EPA on 1300 372 842. This registers the site and ensures the appropriate EPA, MFB and CFA representatives are notified to inspect, assess and monitor the fire risk.

If your brigade turns out to an incident at a site that's stockpiling more than 5,000 EPU, please ensure that the incident is reported through FIRS and the chain of command.

For more information, contact Matt Allen from the Dangerous Goods Unit at [m.allen@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:m.allen@cfa.vic.gov.au) or phone 5240 2713.

STORY ELIZABETH CALDER



PHOTO: JENNIFER BLYTH

# Group officers planning for risk

Leaders from around the state talk about the unique challenges they face.  
All stories by Leith Hillard.



PHOTO: LEITH HILLARD

## Mark Billing, Jacinta Langdon, Corangamite Group

### The mosaic of private and public land in the Otways dissolves any boundaries between CFA and DELWP.

"When smoke goes up, you don't ask whose is it," said Corangamite Group Officer Mark Billing. At age 47, he's 20 years into the role. "DELWP gets the same pager messages and everyone's there to get the job done."

First Deputy Group Officer (DGO) Jacinta Langdon agreed. "We put in requests for dozers and they say, 'Where?'"

That willingness to share extreme risk is a marked characteristic of this group of 17 brigades including two forestry industry brigades. Its northern end is open rocky grassland through dairying country over the Princes Highway and down to the Great Ocean Road. There are seven high-risk townships in the group area and, at its centre, lies the Otways where conditions weren't right for controlled burning this year. The east burned on Ash Wednesday but the west last burned in 1944.

"Below Lavers Hill you'd swear it was rainforest," said Mark. "Still, this year the bush went from water dripping off the leaves to crisp so quickly. That also means our newer members missed out on hot fire training which is a miss. Fuel loadings are off the scale." (A Lavers Hill community shelter will be ready for summer 2016-17.)

When Wye River and Apollo Bay brigades asked to join the group several years ago, the answer was an emphatic yes and high angle rescue and the Great Ocean Road were added into the risk mix. In fact, one weekend in October when there wouldn't be enough locals to turn out, the group sent an FCV and crew to provide cover.

The group has 720 volunteers with up to 40 participants in group meetings. "We've got up and comers and people with experience," continued Mark. "And grunt. We've got very quiet brigades who get all their jobs over an eight-week period. We've got six diverse DGOs and any one could be group officer."

"Being group officer is a fully committed social role. Before a bad day I'm talking to all the neighbouring group officers, DELWP and our ops staff. On the day I prefer to be the Div Comm in the car or support to people on the ground from group headquarters. We don't have mobile coverage in a large part of our group area – the blackspot map is all in my head – but we're comfortable with four command channels that work. I can pick up on the tone of people I know well over the radio – it's intuitive. "Any of the DGOs can make a decision and we'll discuss it after. The lines of communication are always open."

Jacinta often goes forward as strike team leader and has just completed sector commander training. Like Mark, on a bad day her employees run her business so she can focus on CFA.

"I'm here for the people and the community," she said. "We've got generations here who haven't seen fire come over the hill but the day I get blasé or lose that fear is the day to leave CFA."

And to close, two of the group's Code Red day imponderables: would the Great Ocean Road be closed? If schools close, would many children be left home alone...?

## Stuart Stevens, Deakin Group

Now in his second year as group officer, Stuart Stevens is quite forward about stepping back.

"We have three DGOs with one in his 20s," he said. "The younger the better. We should be able to share experience and opportunities around and take a backwards step. The group has some fine young strike team and crew leaders who make us proud."

"I admire those people on the back of a truck in their 60s but I don't like it on a hot day. We'd love their experience in an air-conditioned LCF. We also have the district FOV for support on scene throughout District 20 and we're training people up now."

Stuart was delighted to attend a recent Wyuna brigade meeting and see 14 new members presented with their turnout gear.

"The captain organised a community meeting and let people know the brigade was struggling," said Stuart. "People see a truck go out and think all is well so you have to tell them your difficulties. Out of that came these new members and they're keen as mustard. There's a brigade that can do it."

Hitting the fires fast can be challenging with irrigation channels now being filled in and piped as farmers sell off their water.

"We have to travel further to get water because there are no fill points," said Stuart. "They didn't factor in CFA."

"Deakin Group battles mostly grassfires and we need to know from our crews the size and potential of ones they can't quickly pull up. We need



PHOTO: MARTIN FLANAGAN

to know what's in front of it and where are the dwellings. Four of our brigades are along the Murray and Goulburn rivers where there can be any number of campers on a bad day."

## Allan Layton, Alexandra Group

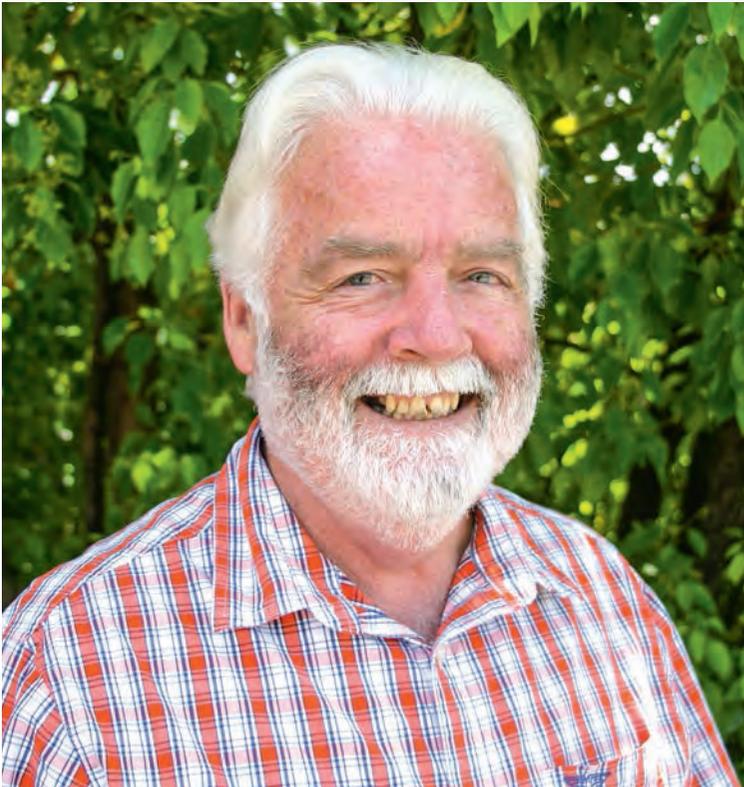


PHOTO: MARTIN FLANAGAN

Although retired from the hydro-electricity industry, second-term Group Officer Allan Layton remains the full bottle on available water in his group area and the figures are grim: in early November, Lake Eildon is at 54 per cent capacity with projections that it will be down to 30 per cent by May 2016.

The group area also includes mountains and forests, both private and crown land, with most fires being "typical one-dayers."

"Our fire is likely to become DELWP's and vice versa," said Allan, "and we have a really good interconnection. Multi-agency fuel reduction burns are great training for our new members and improve the intermingling of crews."

A changeover of captains 18 months ago led to a fresh approach at brigade level which impacts on how the group operates.

"We were fortunate that brigades kept their retiring captains as mentors," continued Allan. "I'm keeping the seat warm for younger ones coming through. I'm getting in behind the scenes to talk and influence. During the drought, town water was made available to rural people through stand pipes. There's pressure to open them again in the face of this new dry and we're part of the conversation."

"Cup weekend was identified as a big household clean-up weekend and the shire agreed to take green waste away free of charge for the benefit of communities prevented from burning by the early introduction of restrictions."

Allan praises the work of brigades in community outreach, with some of them taking advantage of community pizza nights and monthly breakfasts to have fire safety conversations (though not with their mouths full).

"It's the let's-break-bread-together idea," he said. "I think memories are already slipping from 2009 but community connectedness works."



## Mark Bourke, Strzelecki Group



“Plenty of water; that’s usually the saving grace for us,” said Group Officer Mark Bourke. “The stubble usually springs up behind when we cut hay, but not this season. In November many of our creeks and springs have stopped running.”

The group area is mixed farming with tall native timber and plantations, a coastal strip with limited access and three large towns.

The largest recent fire in the area was the Delburn Complex which sparked in late January 2009. “We were busy with that fire until April with not a day off,” said Mark, and rarely a day goes by now without some group work requiring his time.

“We have seven DGOs and two very experienced former group officers in our group management team. I’m very big on delegating and mentoring. If a fire starts, a DGO will go forward in an FCV while other DGOs are in the ICC.

“I prefer field operations – I like smoke up my nostrils. If a fire isn’t explosive, we appoint a less-experienced incident controller and stand beside them. I’ve been a strike team leader and put a vest on someone else when the fire wasn’t flaring too wildly.”

The biggest challenge for the group remains training: having the right courses available at volunteer-friendly times. Mark literally puts his foot down for the cause, teaching on-road driving.

“We have to make sure the group is ready to provide support, availability, people up and coming and training,” he said. “Recruiting people can be a tough ask so once we have them we want to keep them interested and progressing. Access to West Sale training ground gives them live fire experience but it’s also a meet and greet.

“I’ve met damned good people in CFA and it’s important our newer members also get to share in that networking.”

PHOTO: LEITH HILLARD

## Robert Kelm, Grampians Group

**The Grampians Group area is 170,000 hectares of open farmland with tourism on the fringes.**

“We’re in a valley on the western slopes of the Grampians and the eastern slope of the Black Range,” said Group Officer Robert Kelm. “We’re four solid farming brigades and initial attack is often in private units. I’d say 99 per cent are driven by our brigade members and they’re all stickered up to get through traffic management points. Aerial attack out of Stawell has also been a big plus.”

The big minus, however, is the patchy phone coverage in the Black Range and Wartook Valley. The lack of water this season has also been factored into the group’s summer planning.

“We’ve got four-fifths of nothing,” said Robert of the big dry. “Tankers are arranged by the Horsham City Council on TFBs. The Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water pipeline can’t guarantee water because it might be damaged by fire.

“Fire in the Grampians usually ends up coming our way at full force – the 2014 Laharum-Brimpaen fire had flames up to 60 metres high – and we can call for graders to make double grader marks and burn in the middle. The other thing that worked well that year was how quickly DELWP got vets in to assess burned stock.”

Last year, backed by the Victorian Farmers Federation, the group trialled the voluntary interruption of harvesting, requested via pager, when wind on a TFB exceeds 26 kilometres per hour.



PHOTO: LOUISE BRENNAN

“We don’t want to be told what to do and we don’t want the government to legislate,” continued Robert. “It’s self-preservation. A fire in the Grampians can take us out for weeks.”

# Paige Mounsey

## Chewton Fire Brigade, District 2

faces of  
CFA



PHOTO: LEANNE MOUNSEY

### What is your involvement with CFA?

I joined five years ago and I'm now the third lieutenant, community safety coordinator, comms officer, a Fire Ready presenter and a Junior leader. Our Juniors had been inactive for a few years so I got it up and running again and we've now got three members. We're tossing around some ideas for a trial day to give local kids a bit of an idea about what's involved because it's fun if we have more members.

I'm working in admin support in the Fire Equipment Maintenance office in Bendigo and I love dealing with the brigades and helping them. I'm also finishing my Certificate 4 in Frontline Management through the VFBV Leadership Program.

### Why did you join?

My younger sister did Youth Crew then joined Chewton as a Junior. I went along to the training even though I was 18 and so was too old. Dad used to come down and watch us and he was coaxed to join because they needed more truck drivers. He was doing the recruit course and telling me how interesting it was and how easily I would get my head around the theory.

### What was the first incident you attended?

Probably a cat up a tree. It had been spooked in a storm. One of our members is a painter and we had to use his ladder because it was so high up.

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

The first biggish fire I went to was a year ago on Australia Day. It was a mild day with no wind and we were called to Greenhill [near Malmsbury] and thinking it wouldn't be anything much but there were people and trucks everywhere. It was a grassfire that moved so quickly and was burning near a couple of houses. That was the first time I'd been to a fire where houses were under threat.

### What CFA training have you got the most out of?

The leadership courses have been so beneficial and given me so much confidence. When I started with CFA I didn't consider becoming a leader, but I've done the Teamwork and Introduction to Leadership courses at Blampied which help you realise your own potential. You're mixed in with captains and first lieutenants and you learn so much from them and about yourself. You face challenges and work through them together. It forces you to really step up but it's also great fun.

### What are the benefits of volunteering in CFA?

I can't imagine not being part of CFA. It's the environment in the brigade and the chance to meet and make friends with all sorts of people. There are so many opportunities. I like the community safety aspect of CFA most and had the chance to go to the community engagement forum. We heard about so many great projects which give you ideas about different ways to do things.

I might not stay in Chewton forever but wherever I am I'll transfer into a brigade.

### What do you do in your spare time?

Most of my spare time goes into CFA and I've started going to the gym because I'm looking into career firefighting. That's sort of the goal over the next few years. Apart from that, we're keeping up the hard work at brigade level and at the moment that means recruiting. We're looking for new ways to connect with the community and show them that we're not only about firefighting.

INTERVIEW BY LEITH HILLARD

## Horsing around with the neighbours

For its Open Day this year, Barnawartha Fire Brigade teamed up with the local Head in the Hole festival. Brigade members were also fortunate to have the Chiltern SES unit alongside them.

On the back of some well-received advice picked up at the Community Engagement and Hazard Awareness State Forum held in Creswick, the brigade made a concerted effort to help its community. Tips picked up at the forum included taking the message to the people; walk the crowd; provide something a little different; and have something for the little ones – Laddie the pony (pictured) generated a lot of interest.

This event was a huge success for the brigade. Given the small community, credit must go to the four brigade members who shared information and chatted with at least 50 people who wouldn't normally engage with the brigade. The effort put into promoting fire safety messages, getting to know community members and having a bit of fun was really worthwhile.

Other brigade members cooked a barbecue, attended to car parking and generally helped out.

The support of the brigade management team was critical and it made a difference having these members allocated to this activity.

The brigade only has 70 to 100 turnouts a year, so it was unlikely there would be an incident while brigade members were running the open day. But, no more than an hour and a half into the day's proceedings, a call-out was received. Thankfully, the brigade had planned for it – some members looked after community members at the event while others responded to the incident.

STORY GEOFFREY BARTER



PHOTO: GEOFFREY BARTER



PHOTO: BLAIR DELLEMUN

## Victoria's largest station opens

**CFA's busiest fire station was officially opened in Dandenong in early October.**

The ceremony followed CFA tradition with a march from the old fire station to the new one 400 metres down the road.

"The new Dandenong Fire Station has been built to meet the current needs of the brigade responsible for protecting lives and property in this highly-populated and busy area," said Dandenong Fire Brigade Officer-in-Charge Paul Carrigg.

"This integrated brigade responds to more than 2,300 call-outs a year – more than any other CFA brigade – so it was important to update the station to meet the ever-changing complexities of our work and the increasing demand for our services.

"The station will allow us to deliver a more comprehensive level of direct and timely support to surrounding brigades, as well as being able to offer the community specific information, guidance and fire-safety-related services."

The design concept of the station was based on the Geelong City Fire Station with an expansion to cater for additional numbers per shift.

The facility boasts six fire truck parking bays, amenities for 16 on-shift staff, administration offices, large meetings areas, 51 car parking spaces, outdoor training areas, including a dedicated road accident rescue training area, and a vehicle maintenance and cleaning area.

The integrated team of volunteers and career firefighters provides 24/7 response to Greater Dandenong and the surrounding areas, and also supports other parts of Victoria with its specialist trucks and skills.

STORY AMY SCHILDBERGER

## BMT workshops going well

Over the past few months, the Volunteerism and Brigade Support teams have been travelling around the state to facilitate brigade management team (BMT) workshops.

These workshops help BMT members develop and maintain effective brigades by developing specific strategies that meet their individual brigade needs.

The two-hour workshops – effective communication, managing team performance, meeting skills and work/life balance – are highly interactive and discussion based.

Shane Cramer from Greendale brigade, which held the effective communication workshop, said it made a real difference.

“Nothing is so good that it can’t be better,” said Shane. “This workshop helps to build on strengths of the brigade members and has the potential to smooth out any roadblocks involving the decision-making process.”

Lorne Fire Brigade used the managing team performance workshop to identify strategies to motivate and support their members through training and development, coaching and mentoring, and refining their skills in providing feedback.

With meetings being a big part of brigade life, it’s no surprise that the meeting skills workshop has been requested by many brigades. Birregurra brigade Captain Ronnie Brown said his team found the workshop really useful and highly recommend it to others. Ronnie highlighted the importance of setting an agenda and effectively managing meeting time. He added that as a result of the workshop, the brigade’s last meeting ran smoothly and finished early – which made everyone happy.

For more information or to schedule a BMT workshop for your brigade, contact [otv-volunteerism@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:otv-volunteerism@cfa.vic.gov.au) or phone 1800 232 636.

STORY LEANNE WILSON



PHOTO: LEILANI WILLIAMS-BALE

## Kaniva applauds 75-year member

It had been five years since Kaniva Fire Brigade last presented their service medals. Their October event came with an added surprise as Jack Mills became only the second CFA member to be presented with a 75-year service medal.

“He’s a very upright gentleman,” said Brian Charles who was himself presented with a 50-year clasp and life memberships of CFA and Kaniva brigade alongside three others. “Jack is 94 now and up until a few years ago he’d always go to the meetings.”

In fact the pair shared in some operational high jinks.

“Jack is the only guy we took out in the truck but didn’t take home,” said Brian. “We hit a drain and braked hard and Jack got six of his ribs broken. He was taken home in a car.

“Jack was a branch man in the Champs – he loved them and he also loved work. He worked for the shire in a hands-on role and was an ambulance driver for many years. He was always ably supported by his wife Marg who was a member of the Ladies Auxiliary.”

Jack was completely taken by surprise by the medal presentation.

“He made a speech talking about coming back from the war and the local copper telling him it was about time he joined the fire brigade and he never looked back,” continued Brian.

Some may quibble that CFA hasn’t been around for 75 years. Jack’s allegiance to the fire brigade, however, has lasted 75 years and it was appropriate CFA recognise it.

The other member with a 75-year service medal is Robert George Adams from Newham Fire Brigade. Much respect to both men.

STORY LEITH HILLARD



A BMT workshop at Hampton Park brigade

PHOTO: LEANNE WILSON



PHOTO: COURTESY OF WARRNAMBOOL BRIGADE

## Science night burns brightly in Warrnambool

**Warrnambool Fire Brigade members lit up a primary school's annual Science Night in late August, when they demonstrated their gas flare-off skills to hundreds of families.**

The brigade's station is next to Warrnambool Primary School and brigade members are happy to deliver Fire Safe Kids, specialist presentations on fire as a natural disaster and sessions about how the landscape changes.

The school's popular Science Night is used to demonstrate to parents and families the subjects and skills the children are learning in science. The school's science committee always plans to finish the night with a special show and they approached the brigade for help. The brigade decided to safely display the flare-off equipment.

This opportunity also created value for the brigade because several volunteers and staff who have flare-off skills carried out the display as skills maintenance.

The team from the brigade worked seamlessly to present a very professional display. Leading Firefighter Troy Cleverley, who took on the role of MC, explained to the crowd why we would need to take this action at an incident and what steps are taken during the process. He also mentioned a few of the physical properties of gas to give some further science content.

Gas safety around the home and in other places where we use gas was also emphasised.

Those who have seen this equipment in action know it can be quite spectacular, and it was a fitting finale to the night. Everyone enjoyed looking at the big 'Bunsen burner', although there was some expectation of a big bang at the end. Luckily for all involved, there wasn't!

STORY SENIOR STATION OFFICER DAVID FERGUSON

## Unit Citation for Courage Awards

**In late September, six CFA volunteers received the Chief Officer's Unit Citation for Courage for their efforts in the Ournie fire in New South Wales on 17 December 2009.**

The Chief Officer's Unit Citation for Courage is awarded to a brigade, crew or work unit to acknowledge a collective act of courage at a specific incident. Former Chief Officer Euan Ferguson presented the Unit Citation to Tintalra brigade members Terry Forrest, Laurie Forrest, Peter Forrest and Tim De Haan, and Corryong brigade members Greg Wilson and Jamie Evans, who battled extreme fire conditions to save lives and property.

Part of the citation for the Tintalra members states that they "provided outstanding service and demonstrated exemplary courage when fighting a wildfire at a property known as Shepherds Rest in the Ournie area in New South Wales. The weather conditions were severe with wind up to 100km/h making the fire uncontrollable and the fire intensity dictated that their efforts needed to be directed to preservation of life and property.

"The house was in the direct path of the fire and on a hill side at the head of a gully of burning blackberries that led directly to the house, exposing it to severe ember attack. The owner of the property and others were exhausted by their efforts. They were taking turns to go inside to get clear air. Their lives were at great risk. The loss of the domestic water supply due to a burnt poly pipe made their task even more challenging.

"This grave situation demanded that the crew demonstrate considerable courage and self-discipline along with exemplary firemanship in order to ensure their own survival and save the home and the lives of its occupants."

After the fire passed Shepherds Rest, Terry Forrest joined Greg Wilson and Jamie Evans to help the Coutts family. Part of the citation for this action says, "Terry Forrest, Greg Wilson and Jamie Evans, the crew of the Corryong FCV, demonstrated courage and outstanding self-discipline as they made the hazardous journey to the property in order to assist the family.

"On arrival at the property the crew of the FCV quickly sized up the situation. One house was fully involved, the other was under severe threat and the occupants' transport vehicles were on fire. They decided that the only option for survival of everyone was to confront the hazardous road conditions once again and evacuate the three adults, two children and their pets to Tintalra using the FCV.

"The courageous actions by the crew of the FCV are credited with saving the lives of the five members of the Coutts family."

The award presentation night was a time to reflect on the experiences of that day in December 2009, and show appreciation to the crews that demonstrated courage and commitment to ensure the safety of people who were in desperate need of help.

STORY ALEX TODD

PHOTO: CAMERON ROCKE



## Blooming fantastic fundraiser

**In its 90th anniversary year, Upper Beaconsfield brigade is fundraising to replace an ageing brigade-owned Nissan slip-on with a modern, more capable vehicle costing \$130,000.**

An ambitious Open Garden fundraising event was planned, and volunteers, their families and community members worked hard over several months to organise opening four fabulous Upper Beaconsfield gardens to visitors.

In mid-September, blue skies and brilliant sunshine heralded this inaugural event for the brigade, welcoming more than 600 visitors following a publicity campaign using social media. The event was also mentioned on 3AW's *The Big Backyard* radio show and ABC's *Gardening Australia*, and a brigade member promoted the event in an interview on 3CR.

Visitors arrived at the fire station where, for a donation, they collected a garden map and had the opportunity to meet Upper Beaconsfield fireys and members from Pakenham Upper, Pakenham, Emerald, Narre Warren East and Beaconsfield brigades.

Brigade volunteers drove two free shuttle buses to take visitors to and from the gardens. It was great to see the non-stop shuttle buses, fireys and fire trucks circulating around the station and garden areas.

Walking around the gardens was made more enjoyable thanks to Haileybury School's jazz ensemble playing wonderful music, and two landscape designers donated their time to give talks.

Thanks to the generosity of local plant nurseries, a plant stall had a large variety of native and other plants for sale.

Brigade members made sure a produce stall was bursting with mouth-watering homemade preserves, slices, cakes, asparagus and free-range eggs, and the brigade auxiliary served infamous Devonshire teas.

The day was a great success and raised more than \$5,000 for the brigade.

STORY CAROL COOK

## Reuse, recycle, recruit

**Anglesea Fire Brigade members like the idea of working smarter, not harder, and love a bit of recycling. That's why their latest recruitment idea is ticking all the boxes.**

The brigade has decided to recycle members' old *Brigade* magazines by placing a few copies in cafés and shops around town so that people can peruse the magazine while waiting for their lattes. This will raise public awareness about the amazing work of CFA brigades and, hopefully, encourage a few new members down the track.

Each *Brigade* magazine left around town has a label on the cover which says, "Learn about CFA and what volunteers do in the community. Ever wanted to challenge yourself and give back to the community? Express your interest in joining by calling 1800 232 636 or visiting [cfa.vic.gov.au](http://cfa.vic.gov.au)."

Anglesea brigade First Lieutenant Noel Foster has heard that people have been spotted reading the magazine and one store has had all five copies taken.

"It's only in its early days, so no new members yet. But, like any investment, it may take time to get some return," said Noel.

"Regardless, I think it helps educate the public about what we do and, if we get one or two new members, they could be a future leader in the community or brigade – job done!"

This simple, low-effort initiative is showing promise and is easy for other brigades to duplicate locally. *Brigade* magazine is a great resource – why not share it?

STORY ALEXIS VORVIS



PHOTO: NOEL FOSTER

PHOTO: IAN ASHCROFT



## Road safety lessons at Lakes Entrance

**It was a dark and stormy night. Maybe not as dramatic as that, but it was cold and wet.**

This inconvenient fact didn't deter almost 200 family members, learner, probationary and new drivers from attending ROADwhyz Choice and Consequence, a driver safety awareness session held at Lakes Entrance Secondary College.

Maybe it was the free barbecue beforehand, but everyone stayed on for an intensive and hard-hitting evening aimed at raising awareness of the devastating effects of road accidents.

Young drivers are over-represented in road crash statistics. The ROADwhyz program brings home the negative consequences of some of the choices youngsters might make behind the wheel.

Organised by Lakes Entrance Fire Brigade, the night began with a bang caused by a head-on collision in the staff car park. Fortunately, it was just a scenario to give onlookers an idea of a real-life crash.

The Lakes Entrance road rescue team, Ambulance Victoria and police were quickly at the scene to help the driver who was injured and trapped in his vehicle.

People watched the team working to assess the situation, give emergency care to the patient, use the Jaws of Life to gain access, remove the patient and send him to hospital in the waiting ambulance.

It was all done quickly. Emergency services try to work within the 'golden hour' – 20 minutes to the scene, 20 minutes to extract the patient and 20 minutes to the hospital.

Unfortunately, this isn't a realistic aim considering the distances in East Gippsland. Sometimes it takes an hour just to get to the job. The rest of the evening brought home the reality of road accidents.

The ROADwhyz team covered a lot of material – the inescapable physics of what happens in the split seconds of a car crash, the resulting injury and trauma, and what really happens in the hospital emergency department.

One second of distraction can result in a lifetime of suffering for the victim, their family and friends.

The audience heard some tragic stories from people who've lost loved ones in car crashes. A local parent described how her son died in a senseless accident. Eight hundred people went to his funeral. Just one split second error and the effects were felt across the whole community. Some people found this hard-hitting information confronting and distressing. But if this session helps prevent avoidable tragedy and loss of life, it will have been valuable.

There was great support from all the emergency services, the Lakes Entrance Secondary College, local community groups and local businesses.

The ROADwhyz team deserves special thanks for its enthusiasm, dedication and professional approach. To find out more, visit [roadwhyzvic.com.au](http://roadwhyzvic.com.au).

STORY IAN ASHCROFT

# Sky-high results at charity stair climb

More than 200 CFA firefighters from 77 brigades put their physical endurance to the test when they took part in the Melbourne Firefighter Stair Climb in early September.

After an official welcome by Emergency Management Commissioner Craig Lapsley, the firefighters raced up 28 floors to the top of the Crown Metropol Hotel while wearing turnout gear and breathing apparatus weighing 25 kilograms.

This is the second year of the annual event held by the Firefighters Charity Fund to raise money for the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre. Overall, around \$253,000 was raised.

Stonehaven Fire Brigade Second Lieutenant Jeff Harriott raised the most money – a staggering \$12,366 – through sponsorships and by recycling dead car and truck batteries.

“I work in the auto industry, so during every phone call I made to workshops I would ask if they had any spare batteries lying around. I was pretty much inundated,” Jeff said.

“My initial goal was little more than \$300. Once I broke it I kept setting other mini goals and soon it became a bit of an obsession.”

Jeff completed the stair climb in eight minutes and 15 seconds, well behind the winner, MFB’s Michael Ward, who got to the top in three minutes and 30 seconds, but he didn’t mind.

“For me it’s not about the time I do it in, but about the atmosphere on the day. The eight minutes went by pretty quickly, but I’ll definitely do things a bit differently next year.

“The whole process has taught me so much more about the prevalence of cancer and the importance of this cause.

“When I told people what I was fundraising for, it was amazing how many people shared their own stories. It’s a disease that doesn’t discriminate.”

The 2016 Stair Climb will raise money for children’s health. Check [firefighterclimb.org.au](http://firefighterclimb.org.au) for updates.

STORY ALYSSIA MORISON



PHOTO: COURTESY OF FIREFIGHTERS CHARITY FUND



PHOTO: EMILY BRIGGS

Balnarring Captain Graeme Briggs, Ritchies Manager Matt Skiller and Somers Captain John Rogasch

## Ritchies and brigades join forces

During November, more than 30 CFA brigades held barbecues and education displays at Ritchies stores across Victoria to say thank you to their local supermarket and its customers for their support through the Community Benefit Card Program.

CFA brigades have received over \$2.54 million since the program began in 1993, which has helped them to buy equipment and vehicles and upgrade facilities.

Neighbouring brigades Balnarring and Somers got together for a joint event at their local Ritchies as part of Fire Action Week.

Balnarring brigade Captain Graeme Briggs and Somers Captain John Rogasch said both brigades thought the day was a great success. It made their community aware of the brigades and drew attention to the messages that are part of Fire Action Week.

“Our aim was to meet and greet the public by holding an information session and free sausage sizzle,” said Graeme.

“Although the weather was quite inclement and not conducive for reminding the public of the upcoming bushfire season, numerous people stopped to ask questions, seek advice and take away some of the many brochures that were available,” said John.

Diamond Creek brigade members were also at their local store handing out fire safety information and Ritchies Community Benefit cards.

Captain David Murphy said Ritchies’ Community Benefit Card Program has financially supported to Diamond Creek brigade for many years.

“Each month, through the generosity of both Ritchies and the Diamond Creek community, Diamond Creek brigade receives funds, which allows us to purchase essential firefighting equipment,” said David. “In recent years, the brigade has used these funds to buy a thermal imaging camera, lighting equipment, a quick-cut saw, Protek hose branches, and a rabbit tool [used in entrapment situations].”

STORY NANCY THOMPSON

# Australasian Firefighters Champs



EchUCA Fire Brigade, with the support of CFA and VFBV, hosted the Australasian Firefighters Championship in late October at Victoria Park, EchUCA.

Thirty teams from across Australasia participated, including teams from New Zealand and Fiji. The calibre of teams this year was very high, with seven new records set out of the 10 events.

Host brigade EchUCA won the title of 2015 champion team, with Devonport (Tasmania) and Tamworth (New South Wales) coming second and third.

On Saturday night, more than 360 participants and dignitaries attended the official championship dinner at Saint Mary's pool hall. Keynote speaker former Chief Officer Euan Ferguson delivered an inspiring speech about leadership.

Overall, this competition was a great success with beautiful weather, lots of camaraderie, competition and outstanding achievements. The next one will be hosted by New Zealand in 2017.

STORY SASKIA VAN BEVER

PHOTO: SUE BULL

# CFA Juniors compete for national title

**Eighteen CFA Juniors aged 14 and 15 years old from Red Cliffs to Foster competed in the Australian National Fire Cadet Championships at Myuna Bay in New South Wales at the end of September.**

This biennial event is open to junior members of all emergency service agencies across Australia, and gives participants the opportunity to further develop their practical, social and leadership skills.

Acting Executive Director of Operational Training and Volunteerism Kate Harrap said the Victorian competitors stood out for how well they worked together.

"The group met for the first time on a Saturday and by the Tuesday they were working together and communicating better than some of the interstate teams that had been training together for months," Kate said.

The first two-and-a-half days were spent doing team building exercises, which included climbing Sydney Harbour Bridge.

"This was a real challenge for some who had a fear of heights but, with encouragement from each other, they all came away with smiles on their faces," continued Kate.

Each team competed in eight events over two days, including a portable pump relay and hose and hydrant drill.

"The light tanker and hand tool exercise, as well as the knapsack response relay, were the exercises where the Victorians performed their best.

The CFA teams finished 15th, 17th and 19th out of 25 teams. This was a fantastic achievement given that, unlike most teams at the Champs, our teams weren't able to train together beforehand and the events and equipment were unfamiliar to them.

This year's event was co-hosted by the NSW Rural Fire Service and the Rural Fire Service Association, which provided accommodation and meals for the competitors.

STORY ALYSSIA MORISON



PHOTO: SUPPLIED BY LAURA BRACKEN



## Don't drive when fatigued

**Fatigue contributes to more than a fifth of road accidents in Victoria. During the fire season, it's imperative CFA members are extra vigilant in managing the risks associated with fatigue, especially those people who do a lot of driving.**

Fatigue is more than feeling tired and drowsy. In a work context, fatigue is a state of mental or physical exhaustion which reduces a person's ability to perform work safely and effectively. It can occur because of prolonged mental or physical activity, sleep loss or disruption to the internal body clock.

Research shows that the effect of being awake for 17 hours is equivalent to a blood alcohol level of 0.05. Being awake for 20 hours is the equivalent of having a blood alcohol level of 0.1 (twice the legal limit). If you feel any of the following, it's likely you're fatigued and should not drive:

- difficulty in concentrating and easily distracted
- poor judgement and decision making, reduced ability to communicate effectively
- impaired hand-eye coordination and visual perception
- slower reaction times
- reduced memory.

The maximum normal work period is 10 hours including travel time. There are some exceptions

such as specific shift arrangements for career firefighters and deployments during major incidents. To reduce fatigue related to driving:

- use a phone or video conferencing to reduce the need to drive long distances
- plan your work to minimise potential impacts of fatigue, including taking travel times into consideration when scheduling meetings
- make accommodation arrangements when long drives are required, finish times are outside the span of hours or you are tired
- don't drive during hours when you'd normally be asleep
- don't drive for more than two hours without a break
- share driving with other people
- aim to get at least seven hours sleep every 24 hours
- monitor your colleagues for signs of fatigue
- if you are a volunteer, consider any prior activities and potential risk of fatigue when responding to call-outs.

For more information about managing fatigue, go to [cfaonline.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/Show?pageId=fatigue](http://cfaonline.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/Show?pageId=fatigue)

## Health monitoring and rehab project

**The 2009 fires and last year's Hazelwood mine fire significantly increased the expectations and demands for health monitoring of CFA members at incidents.**

The mine fire prompted Emergency Management Victoria to release a carbon monoxide standard that requires health monitoring for large, extended or complex fires that produce significant amounts of carbon monoxide.

CFA established a Health Support team after the 2003 fires to monitor CFA members while on operational duties. To further develop CFA's involvement in health monitoring, the team has implemented a pilot project for the 2015-16 fire season to expand the Health Support

team into seven volunteer brigades that have set up rehab units.

The brigades involved in the pilot project are Golden Square, Mernda, Yellingbo, Yallourn North, Mildura, Rochester and Wonthaggi.

These brigades have recruited nurses and paramedics as volunteer members under the broader membership arrangement.

The rehab crew and health professionals have been trained to use medical monitoring equipment and to assess fireground injuries and to exposures.

This aims of this initiative are to:

- develop and trial a sustainable health monitoring model
- develop and deliver training for health monitoring members

- trial a model for surge capacity
- pilot volunteer involvement in health monitoring at seven volunteer brigades

Since completing their training, three brigades have responded to incidents involving bushfire, structure fire and to support Victoria Police.

Activation of the rehab units can be requested through VicFire and a request for health monitoring can be made through the state duty officer via VicFire.

For more information, phone the health monitoring duty officer on 9262 8844.

STORY PETER LANGRIDGE



PHOTO: WARREN MITCHELSON

## Training ground opens in Mildura

**Emergency services volunteers from across the north-west now have better access to practical training with the opening of a new training campus in Mildura.**

The Victorian Emergency Management Training Centre (VEMTC) – Sunraysia campus, will enhance volunteer training and help firefighters develop the skills they need to protect their local communities.

Former CEO Michael Wootten said the Mildura campus, the seventh regional training site in Victoria, would be a great asset for the region.

“It’s been a long journey from the initial concept in 2007 through to the beginning of construction early last year, and it has been well worth the wait,” Michael said.

“Mildura is now home to a modern training centre and one which services the wider community.”

The training campus features a breathing apparatus training prop, breathing apparatus maintenance building, hot fire training props, administration offices and classrooms.

Michael said all VEMTC campuses were purpose-designed to allow volunteers to take part in training scenarios which were as close as possible to reality.

“Training offered at these centres is practical and scenario-based, meaning members can experience live fire in a safe, controlled and realistic environment,” he said.

“This is essential for preparing our members for the varied and often complex types of fires and other incidents they will attend.”

Before Sunraysia opened, the nearest training facilities were at Longerenong or Huntly (both more than 300 kilometres away), so having a training centre in Mildura means volunteers will spend less time travelling.

STORY ANGELA VALENTE

## Boosting volunteers’ leadership skills

**A group of CFA volunteers honed their leadership skills in mid-September thanks to a generous donation from IGA’s Community Chest Program.**

Over a year, IGA stores raised more than \$114,000 which CFA used to run four Fireline Leadership courses for 80 members.

CFA’s Fireline Leadership Program Coordinator and Senior Instructor Jamie Mackenzie said these courses are aimed at newly-elected brigade leaders and future leaders.

“The program promotes the development of skills, behaviours and cultural attitudes which enable first response leaders to make sound command decisions, communicate effectively and prepare cohesive teams,” Jamie said.

“The leadership philosophies and techniques introduced in this program have been proven effective in building and maintaining effective teams that work in stressful and high-risk operations.

“Thanks to the generosity of IGA and the community, the CFA members who did the course came away with a direction and plan to strengthen themselves and their brigades, and gave them the leadership tools to help them and their teams protect lives and property.”

IGA stores across Victoria have a long and valued relationship with CFA. To strengthen this relationship, IGA leaders and upcoming leaders from six stores joined CFA members on these courses.

“This was a great opportunity for our members to work alongside leaders in a different field,” said Jamie.

STORY GEORGINA HILL AND AMY SCHILDBERGER





# Wangaratta exercise a barrel of fun

Around 75 members from 14 Wangaratta Group brigades enjoyed the practical challenges, fellowship and sausages of an October morning pre-season exercise.

There was a strong emphasis on cross crewing in preparation for a summer where strike team members are likely to turn out on trucks other than their home brigade's, as always.

Wangaratta member Kane Waring helped plan the exercise and acted as incident controller.

"It's so important to know our way around a range of CFA vehicles," he said. "Above all, we need all our members to know how to deploy the crew protection system in a truck other than their own. If you have to get on board when a fire approaches, you don't care about the name on the side of the truck."

The annual burnover exercise was conducted in the river redgum forest and wetlands of the Ovens Heritage River. One crew didn't disconnect the hose before jumping in the truck, but an exercise is the best time to make mistakes.

While the forest generally stays green year-round, that's not the case this year as the area missed the usual saturating rains of winter.

Two members of Parks Victoria were on-hand to discuss the 10-tonne-per-hectare fuel load and fuel types, and swap local knowledge with Boorhaman Captain Pete Seymour in particular. Also covered were prevailing winds, previous large fires in the area, and the vital importance of using water only, not foam, to fight fire along the river.

Crews then moved to a paddock to work on the mechanics of getting water on board their own and an unfamiliar truck from a dam.

It was then time to roll out the barrel as members on trucks trained hoses on a barrel and moved it around to simulate the edge of a running grassfire and practise tanker tactics.



"They were working on speed and driving distance," continued Kane, "and efficient knockdown at 700 KPA. We were also pushing the wearing of full PPE: no forgetting your gloves and helmets during an exercise or ever."

The exercise was welcomed by Captain Emma-Lee Brennan of Laceby West brigade who mentored four of the brigade's new members (pictured above).

"Our numbers were low so we put out a flyer and got five new members," said Emma. "They've done their Minimum Skills [now Recruit Training Program] training and today they can build on what they've learned and just give it a go. Now we have 10 members ready to get on the truck – it's a fantastic boost."

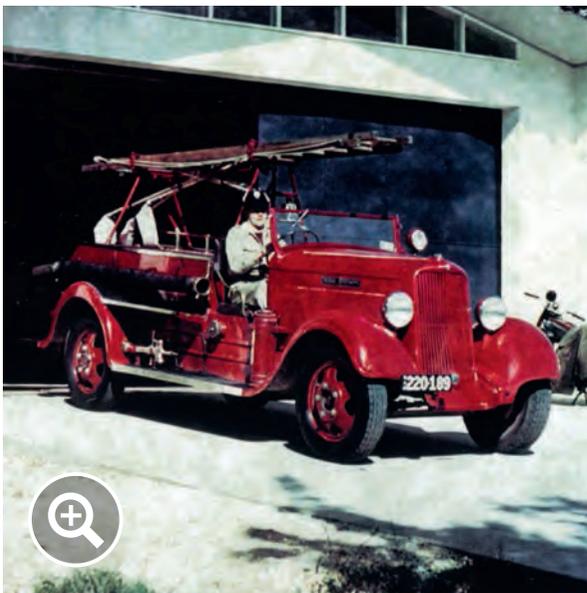
The exercise was also the ideal time to pinpoint any mechanical issues with the trucks. Kane also identified the "scratchy communications" between vehicles and back to the local command facility as an issue that needs ironing out.

Current Group Officer John Barnard and ex-Group Officer Graham Colson were just two of the mentors delegating and watching others step up, very happy with the skills and commitment of all members.

STORY LEITH HILLARD

# Through the ages – Buninyong





# Emergency Memberlink



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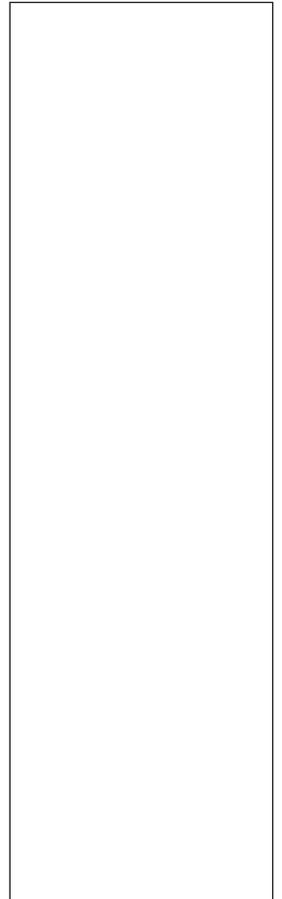
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