



PROTECTING LIVES AND PROPERTY | AUTUMN 2013

BRIGADE



“HIT IT HARD,
HIT IT FAST”

MEMBERS RESPOND TO
THE CHIEF'S CALL

COVER STORY

Challenging fire season 05–16

Members fight hard during a long summer

Incident summary 04

The latest statistics from around Victoria

Fiskville update 17

Environmental findings at Fiskville are encouraging

Last year's key achievements 18

A round-up of our successes

CEO's column 20

Mick Bourke discusses the Kilmore East trial

Keeping the fleet mobile 21

How our vehicles fared this fire season

Chief Officer's column 24

Euan Ferguson reflects on the fire season

EMap program takes off 25

EMap improves situational awareness

Supporting our firefighters 27

The role of auxiliaries, employers and logistics experts

Bravery awards for Kinglake 30

15 members recognised for acts of bravery

A long way to the top 31

CFA members take on the Eureka Climb



Jeparit's first responders 32

Jeparit brigade also gives medical support

Urban Champs 33

Results from Warrnambool

Regional directors' columns 34

The latest issues from all eight regions

News from OT&V 38

Operational training strategy and campus upgrades

Rescuing large animals 39

Workshop gives tips on freeing trapped animals

Working with fire-curious kids 40

A statewide program for kids aged six to 17

Community Fireguard turns 20 41

This service is now helping 10,000 people

CFA Sunday success 42

A great effort by 286 brigades

Through the ages 43

Bayswater in the spotlight

Faces of CFA 44

Brendan O'Neill from Warrnambool brigade



CLAIRE HIGGINS ACTING CHAIR

Victorian fire services are mourning the loss of four firefighters in the line of duty this fire season – an incalculable loss to their families, friends, colleagues and communities. CFA and the Department of Sustainability and Environment stand

together, devastated by these tragic deaths that are all being investigated by the coroner.

In recognition of the inherent risks in the work performed by our firefighters and the importance of the health and safety of all our people, the Board has recently established a Health, Safety and Environment sub-committee. This committee has endorsed the CFA Health, Safety and Environment Strategy that will be launched shortly.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria CEO Andrew Ford recently gave a presentation to the CFA Board of the results of their recent Welfare and Efficiency survey. The themes surveyed were: respect and professionalism; my role as a CFA volunteer; cooperation; support from CFA; training by CFA; recruitment and retention, and people management.

The Board and senior management have been invited to work with VFBV to understand the issues and perceptions behind the survey results with a second survey to be conducted in March/April this year.

All interested members are strongly encouraged to participate. Take the survey as an opportunity to engage in good conversations at district council, group or brigade level: what is working well and what can be improved on. CFA is well served by members prepared to share their views and both support and drive change. The survey can help us identify and resolve issues early and monitor matters that affect the efficiency and welfare of all members. It can also help us identify and build on best practice.

The former Victoria Police Deputy Commissioner Kieran Walshe has been appointed as the independent monitor on Fiskville. Reporting directly to the CFA Board Acting Chair, Mr Walshe will oversee CFA's progress in implementing the 10 recommendations and 11 management initiatives resulting from Professor Joy's report. All these reports will be made available to the public. ■

ASH WEDNESDAY REMEMBRANCE STORY KEITH PAKENHAM

With so many people attending the magnificently rebuilt St John's Anglican Church in Upper Beaconsfield, the air was hot and stifling but it was no match for that disastrous day we were honouring.

Fellow firefighters and families came from near and far to remember our fallen ones on Ash Wednesday, and to share the grief as an extended family bound together because of that one day.

There was seating for around 500 people in the church, hall and rear decking and the multimedia screens meant that everyone could see and hear the tributes from dignitaries and firefighters. As the local children beautifully sang the National Anthem, the mood was lifted before the serious reminders of the events 30 years ago unfolded.

But it was not just about the losses – it was also of the successes and recovery since then. When those who had fought the fires on that day stood up in the crowd, an unprompted applause showed our gratitude.

Before, during and after the service I saw so many people recognising old friends and having lively conversations. Sure, it was a time to reflect but it was also a time to reconnect and be thankful that areas have since recovered and time has helped us move forward.

To commemorate the 30th anniversary, the Victorian Government is inviting people to share their stories of recovery and hope on the website ashwednesday30.vic.gov.au. ■

To see more images go to news.cfa.vic.gov.au/ashwednesday



Left: Chief Officer Euan Ferguson with the twisted cross from the original St John's Anglican Church

PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

WELLBEING RESEARCH RESULTS STORY MICHELE KONHEISER

The response to recent wellbeing research carried out by CFA shows that our members are highly committed to wellbeing. Last September, 932 people across the state completed our survey and these are the main findings:

- CFA's wellbeing services are well respected and well used. Of the 301 respondents who had accessed support, 85 per cent were satisfied
- 93 per cent of respondents were confident they can fulfil their responsibility to fellow members by keeping an eye on their welfare
- 69 per cent know where to get help if they need it
- 46 per cent don't seek help because they want to deal with problems themselves
- 33 per cent prefer to use their brigades internal processes for welfare

- 53 per cent prefer to receive email updates about wellbeing and 47 per cent prefer information in *Brigade* magazine
 - As well as our traditional welfare services, around 40 per cent would use online problem-solving products and online counselling services
- Thanks for sharing your opinions in this research. We'll continue to improve wellbeing services and keep you informed through *Brigade* magazine, CFA News and Media website. To receive email updates, send your name, your connection to CFA, your brigade or workgroup location and whether you're a frequent user of Facebook to welfareservices@cfa.vic.gov.au.

For more about our Peer Support Program see p26. ■

VOLUNTEER SUPPORT PROGRAM

We are in the process of recruiting 22 new people as part of the Volunteer Support Program. These new roles will be based throughout the state and will work on important matters affecting volunteerism.

The Volunteer Support Program and its key priorities have been extensively developed by CFA in collaboration with VFBV and will help CFA implement many of the recommendations made in the report that came out of the Jones Inquiry.

The program includes three broad themes: volunteer development, volunteer sustainability and volunteer support. The Volunteer Development project team will ensure that training and standards are readily available and understood by volunteers and that any prior accreditation and achievements are easily recognised. There will be a strong focus on improving the wellbeing of volunteers,

understanding the local requirements and providing direct support to catchment teams and brigades around psychological safety and conflict resolution.

The Volunteer Sustainability project team will focus on statewide recruitment, recognition and retention. It will also design and deliver a consistent set of tools and resources to attract and recruit volunteers. The Volunteer Support project team will document and share successful case studies across the state.

We will also develop a centralised member help desk for volunteers and brigades, and a CFA alumni to help build relationships, create formal mentoring opportunities and provide connections to CFA.

All these initiatives will help improve the support and development available to members so that we can focus on what we do best – protecting lives and property. ■

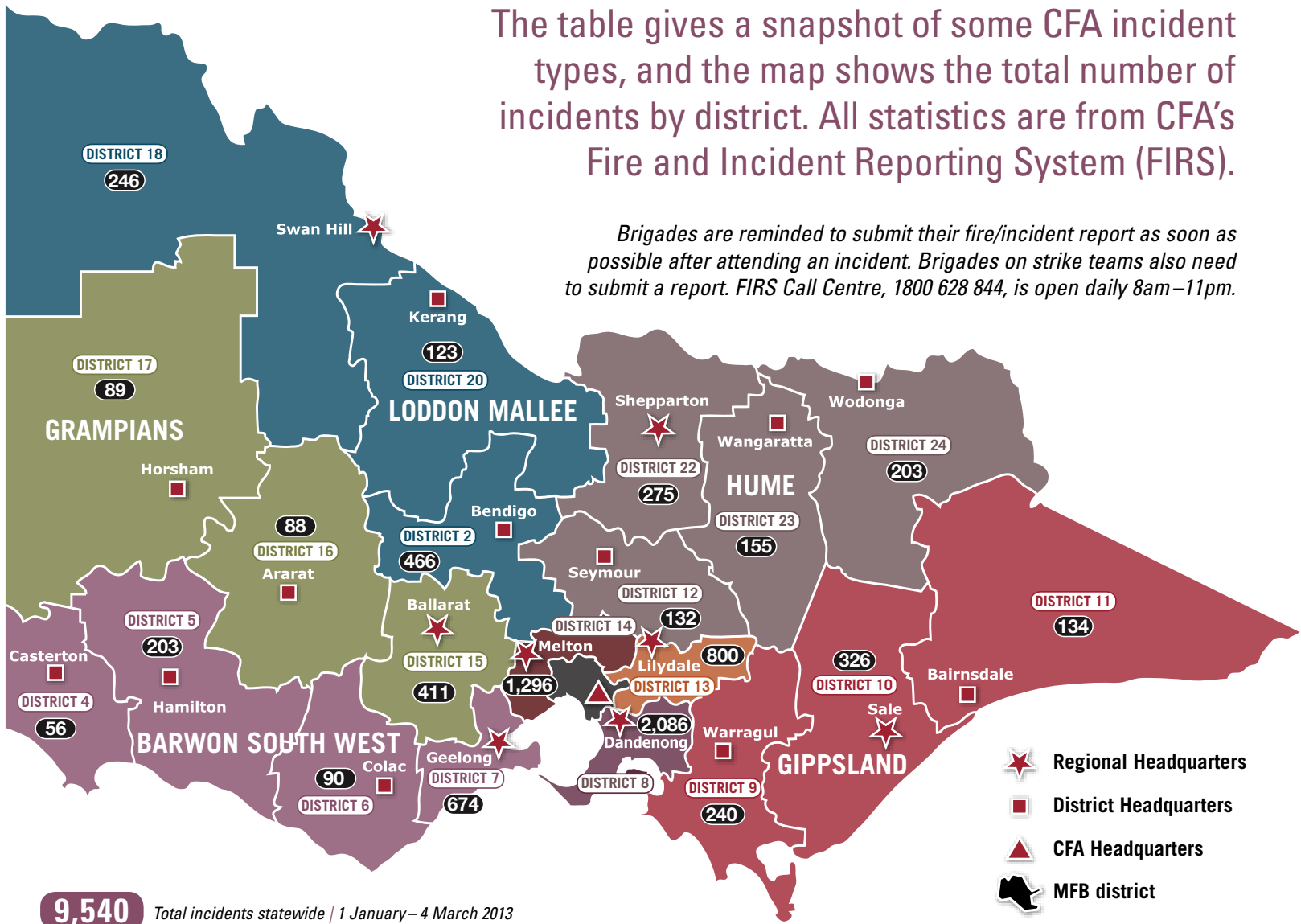
INCIDENT STATISTICS

INCIDENT TYPE	1 JANUARY – 4 MARCH 2013			1 OCTOBER – 31 DECEMBER 2012		
	Est. loss	Est. ha burnt	No. of incidents	Est. loss	Est. ha burnt	No. of incidents
Bush and forest		6,025	73 ^a		1,201	41 ^a
Car fires and motor vehicle accidents			827			1,294
False alarms			1,166			1,734
Grassfires		17,336	197 ^b		3,245	228 ^b
Hazardous materials			512			688
House fires	\$11,233,080		212	\$11,380,150		300
Industrial fires	\$2,421,600		36	\$6,173,200		56
	\$13,654,680	23,361	3,023	\$17,553,350	4,446	4,341

^aForest and bushfires and scrub or bush and grass mixture fires larger than one hectare; ^bLarger than one hectare

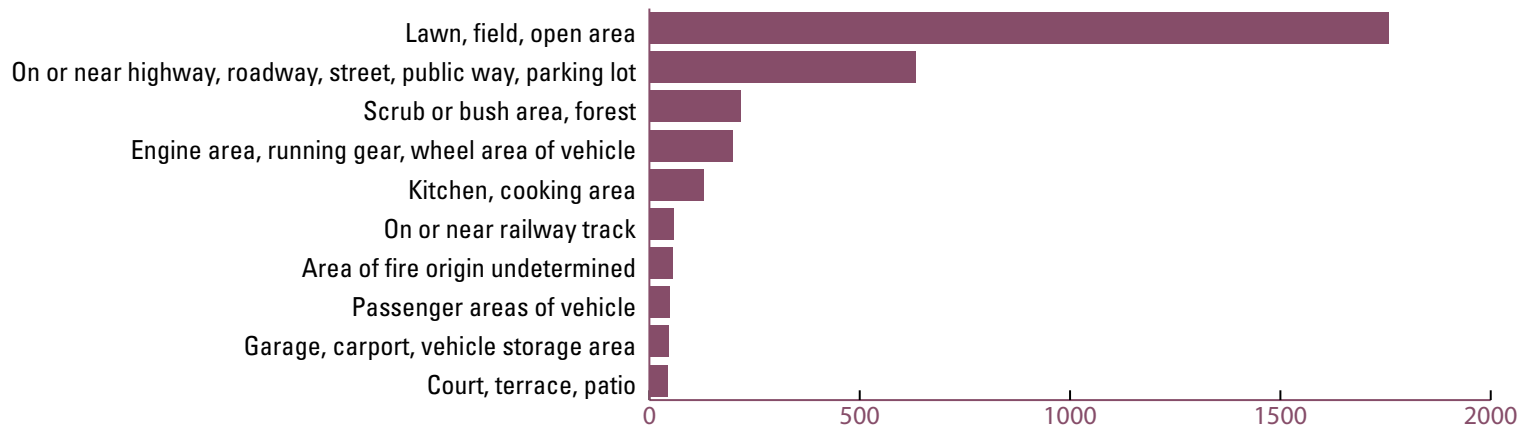
The table gives a snapshot of some CFA incident types, and the map shows the total number of incidents by district. All statistics are from CFA's Fire and Incident Reporting System (FIRS).

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.



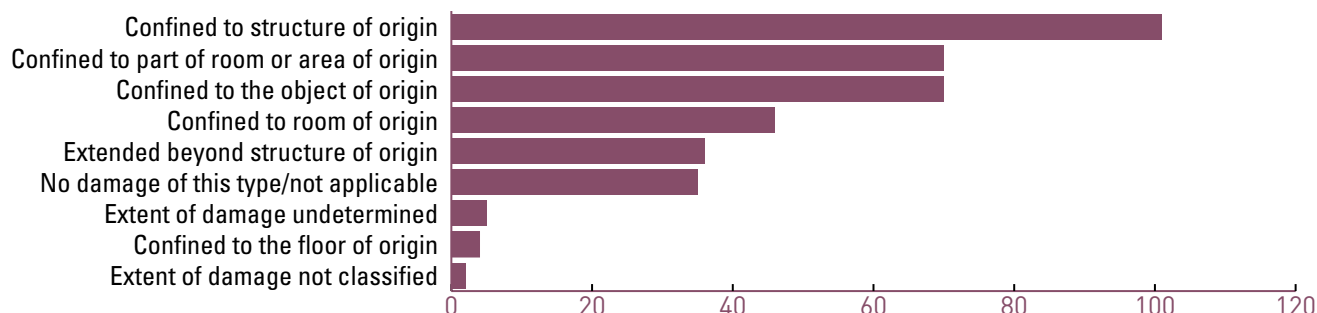
ORIGIN OF FIRE

1 JANUARY – 4 MARCH 2013



EXTENT OF FLAME DAMAGE

1 JANUARY – 4 MARCH 2013



FIRE SEASON HEADS TO THE HILLS

STORY LEITH HILLARD

A fire season that began, unsurprisingly, with crop fires sparked by machinery soon took to the hills ... and stayed there. Large and long-duration fires in hilly terrain led to an enormous strike team response with crews also responding from interstate and New Zealand. Also, a number of CFA members helped fire services in New South Wales and Tasmania, gaining valuable insights into other ways of operating.

Victorian fires in often hard-to-access areas brought CFA into close collaboration with both the Department of Sustainability and Environment and Parks Victoria. Perhaps our now unified eMap system can serve as a symbol of interoperability: emergency services going in the same direction.

This cooperative workforce didn't just take to the fireground but also operated side by side in incident control centres and Victoria's State Control Centre.

A large aircraft fleet did excellent work in tandem with ground crews, knocking the head of fires or water bombing hard-to-reach flare-ups. Our members can confirm that Elvis still rocks.

And when dark clouds rolled in in late summer and Victorians looked to the sky hoping for rain, it was more likely to be a band of dry lightning that sparked a flurry of both late afternoon and night-time fires. ■



PHOTO: DAVID BROWN

VICTORIANS SAY THANKS

Over the summer, CFA's Facebook page received thousands of messages of thanks from the public. Here are a handful that give an idea of what CFA means to our communities.

We wish to thank all involved who contained the fire at Menzies Creek on 23 Feb. The response, dedication and action from our local CFA was absolutely awesome. It was such a reassurance that CFA was so dedicated and hard working that the fire didn't spread to our home.

Chris, Kelly, Livia and Emmy

Every day I think of how hard CFA volunteers and all involved must be trying to save houses, people, livestock and containing these fires. What would happen if we didn't have wonderful people like you?

Paul Cimarosti

Thank you to all the men and women that saved our town of Coongulla on Friday and for saving so many homes and lives. You are the real Australia Day heroes.

Jodi Freeman

Could you please pass on our heartfelt thanks to all those men and women who defended our property in Carngham during the recent fires. These people put their own lives at risk to help people like ourselves.

Jan and Chris Soar

A huge thank you to each and every firefighter that risks their life each day for the public's safety. You are amazing and do a wonderful job and deserve the highest praise. Thank you on behalf of myself and my family. We are very grateful.

Heather Bremner

Without volunteers we would be in a right mess. Great job in Harcourt guys. That wind was a bit all over the shop but you once again had it all sorted in great time.

Bev Green

Thank you to all of the CFA volunteers, DSE, dozer drivers, grader drivers, plantation crews, aircraft pilots, people supporting those fighting the fires, and anyone else who came and helped fight the Grampians fire that threatened my family's property at Glenisla.

Kelpie Barber

Thanks to all the volunteers who keep us all safe. You do this in very difficult conditions and show us what the Aussie spirit is all about.

Catherine Lynch

Grass fire in Endeavour Hills controlled. Thanks guys, you're the best. Keep up the great work.

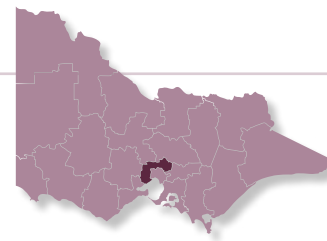
Nikki

Cheers for saving our farm and neighbours' farms. Much appreciated.

Thomas Gillman

MELBOURNE'S NORTHERN SUBURBS THREATENED

STORY **KEITH PAKENHAM**



INCIDENT: Grass and scrub fire

DISTRICT: 14

DATE: 18 February 2013

Around lunchtime, crews were called out to a fast-moving grass and scrub fire on Donnybrook Rd, Donnybrook.

Mount St Leonards and Kangaroo Ground fire towers both confirmed thick black smoke showing and growing in size. Craigieburn Senior Station Officer Paul Also quickly called for 20 tankers and aircraft support.

The fire continued to head south towards Epping and very quickly affected traffic on the Hume Freeway. Police closed a section of the freeway and CFA, MFB and Department of Sustainability and Environment crews arrived to protect factories and homes in the area. It took around 80 trucks and six aircraft to control the fire.

As strike teams arrived, they were deployed to fight the fire as it ran along the freeway reserve and headed across long grass towards buildings. A staging area for vehicles was organised by Gisborne Incident Control Centre at Epping Recreational Reserve.

The BP petrol station in Cooper St, Epping, and several factories in Scanlon Drive, also in Epping, were threatened as grass and trees ignited around them. Combined crews did a valiant job and minimised damage to those sites.

Many homes were saved in this 2040-hectare fire, but several sheds were destroyed or damaged, 3,000 hay bales lost, one house damaged, and seven vehicles damaged or destroyed.

Crews worked well into the night and were fed by a great team from the Salvation Army in the Epping Football Club building.

Over the following days, crews blacked out hundreds of smouldering trees and stumps. ■

To see more images go to news.cfa.vic.gov.au/donnybrook



PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

PHOTO: MARK URSCHART



PHOTO: KEITH PANGNANI



PHOTO: MARK URSCHART

HOUSES SAVED NEAR BALLARAT

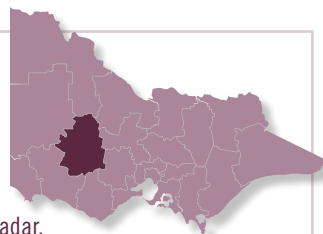
STORY **DUNCAN RUSSELL**

INCIDENT: Grass and scrub fire

DISTRICT: 16

DATE: 8 January 2013

BRIGADES: Beaufort, Smythesdale, Brewster, Burrumbeet, Lake Goldsmith-stockyard, Mannibadar, Ballarat, Ballarat City, Haddon, Learmonth-addington, Linton, Snake Valley & district, Cardigan & Windermere, Carranballac, Skipton, Sebastopol, Wendouree, Cape Clear, Clunes, HVP Ballarat, Langi Kal Kal, Miners Rest, Raglan, Waubra, Pura Pura, five strike teams



A 1,300 hectare fire that started at Chepstowe, west of Ballarat near Snake Valley, destroyed nine houses including the historic 120-year-old Carngham Station, a grandiose two-storey homestead.

The fire also killed around 800 livestock, destroyed 12 cars and tractors, and damaged vineyards and sheds belonging to Chepstowe Vineyard at

Carngham. But, despite these losses, at least 20 houses and a pine plantation were saved by the work of 360 CFA members, 42 Department of Sustainability and Environment personnel and 10 private plantation firefighters. They were supported by six aircraft and three dozers.

It was contained by the evening and a mineral earth firebreak was built around 10km of the 17km fire perimeter.

"The fire started at the bottom of a slope and, with the wind behind it and high fuel loads, it took off at a phenomenal rate," said Operations Officer Ross Anderson.

Ross was on the incident management team at Ararat when the fire began. When he saw it was heading into bushland at Chepstowe where there were several houses, he issued an Emergency Warning.

Almost 400 residents from the farming community of Carngham were evacuated, as were occupants of Burrumbeet Caravan Park and campers on the southern side of the lake at Burrumbeet. Two men were taken to Ballarat Hospital with minor burns and four more people were treated at hospital for smoke inhalation.

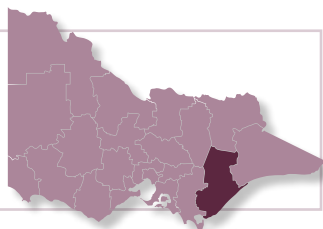
The fire, which travelled for five kilometres before it was stopped, was caused by a farmer's ute. ■

CONTAINMENT LINES COVER 300 KILOMETRES

INCIDENT: Aberfeldy-Donnellys bushfire

DISTRICT: 10

DATE: 17 January 2013



Victoria's largest fire since 2009 burnt around 87,000 hectares in Gippsland, claimed the life of one man, and destroyed 21 houses, dozens of sheds and 17 vehicles.

Starting in Aberfeldy, north of Baw Baw National Park, the fire travelled east and south-east burning houses in Seaton, where a man was found dead in a burnt-out car. At the height of the fire, around 760 personnel, more than 180 vehicles, 23 dozers and 13 aircraft tackled the blaze.

Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), CFA, Parks Victoria and Melbourne Water personnel battled the fire for more than six weeks and built more than 300 kilometres of containment lines. Many areas of the fire were in steep and rocky terrain, which made it difficult for firefighters.

A day after the fire started, it impacted Licola Road and isolated Licola township with campers in the area asked to leave.

Three days into the fire, crews protected Glenmaggie and Heyfield by back burning 180 hectares a few kilometres from the towns and built containment lines to protect Aberfeldy and the Thomson Dam.

Transport Safety Victoria put exclusion zones in place on Lake Glenmaggie to ensure helicopters had safe and unrestricted access to the water for the firefighting effort. This action was taken after some recreational users of the lake were seen following helicopters in their boats and jet skis.

CFA crews spent two days and nights protecting historic Walhalla by back burning and making control lines, after a change in wind direction could have brought the small town under direct fire.

The days blurred together for Seaton brigade Captain Graeme Lord.

"When the fire came through, I lost cars, a shed and a caravan and other members of the brigade lost sheds, cattle and fencing," he said.

"We were mopping up and blacking out all weekend. Strike teams picked up a lot of the slack to give us a break and we wouldn't have got through all the jobs without them.

"By the second week we were still getting about four call-outs a day to fallen and smoking trees. The doors of the fire station have been open at all hours.

"This fire is the second fire into the township in recent memory. In 2006 it came all the way in, but we didn't lose any houses that time.

"One of the community meetings we held had 91 people so we managed to get a lot of information out to the people who needed it."

When Coongulla was threatened by fire Coongulla brigade borrowed two collar tanks from Sale brigade and put them several kilometres out of town in DSE territory. Coongulla Captain Geoff Lynch said, "We don't want to be caught with our pants down. The dams are nearly all dry and this water is there ready for us and DSE.

"We needed something up there because you can't get a 3000-litre 3.4C up there. Fortunately, we have a 3.4D and that can just make it.

"When the fires came close on 17 January, the town emptied and we had about a dozen people left. We have 175 holiday houses for rent and all those people left.



PHOTO: KEITH PAKKHAM

Three weeks into the fire, there was significant fire activity on the northern edge that generated a lot of smoke.

DSE Deputy Incident Controller Peter West said the plume could be seen from as far away as Traralgon.

"The fire spotted over the control line and into very steep country, inaccessible to ground crews, so we put two water-bombing helicopters and two fire bombers on it," he said.

"It was still behind the fallback lines, but had the potential to develop further in the hot weather, so we attacked it aggressively."

The Wollangarra Outdoor Education Camp was under threat and the fire also came close to private property at Glenfalloch Station. Mr West said DSE and CFA strike teams helped staff at the camp to defend the property.

After four weeks, there was still significant activity in the northern part of the fire around Glenfalloch and Mount Useful, but most of the fireground was quiet with crews monitoring the area and blacking out.

At the end of February, around 70mm of rain fell on the fireground in 48 hours. This significantly reduced fire activity, but the wet, slippery conditions slowed back burning and blacking out work. On 28 February the fire was declared contained.

"It has been an arduous 43 days for the crews and incident management team working around the clock in extremely remote and rugged terrain," said Fire Services Commissioner Craig Lapsley. ■

To see more images go to news.cfa.vic.gov.au/aberfeldy

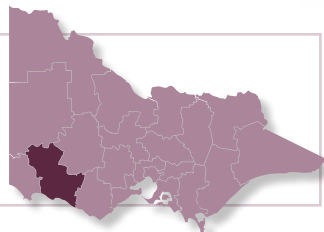


VALENTINE'S DAY SURPRISE FOR GRAMPIANS

INCIDENT: Victoria Valley Complex bushfire

DISTRICT: 5

DATE: 14 February 2013



What began as several small fires, caused by lightning north-east of Hamilton, turned into a 35,875-hectare fire when they joined together. The fire affected the south-western Grampians National Park.

Over 300 firefighters from CFA, Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and Parks Victoria, plus 14 aircraft, worked on the Victoria Valley Complex. Firefighters from New Zealand and New South Wales also helped with the suppression effort.

Strong winds pushed the fire across the Victoria Range. Planned burns completed last autumn along the Harrop Track in the Grampians National Park helped to control the spread of the fire to the west.

Communities west of the park including Cavendish, Glenisla and Woolpooper experienced significant smoke drift from the fire, but firefighters kept the fire inside the park boundary.

To the south east of the Victoria Valley Complex, there was a small fire in the Serra Range. Thirty firefighters had to walk into the area and specialist crews were dropped in by helicopter because the fire was in difficult and remote terrain.

A part of the fire threatened Mirranatwa and an Emergency Warning was issued. With unpredictable fire behaviour due to winds, residents were told that the advice on this fire may change between an Emergency Warning and a Watch and Act.

Some farming properties in the area were threatened but containment lines around the perimeter of the fire ensured no properties were lost. However, 60 sheep were killed, two machinery sheds and one hay shed were destroyed, 130km of fencing was lost, 65 hectares of hardwood forest and 30 tonnes of hay.

Don Robertson is the Dundas Group communications officer – the group at the heart of the Victoria Valley fire – and a CFA Board member.

“Deputy Group Officer Chips Menzel and I went to Mooralla to talk to the locals,” said Don. “Having that knowledge of the conditions meant that we could put a strong case to the incident control centre for graders.

“Group Officer Burt Astbury, the deputy group officers and I concentrated on working with the incident control centre so they can get the best local knowledge from us. Our group threw a lot of resources at the fire, including the western side of the Victoria Range, to the north of Mooralla.

“The terrain is very difficult which means that CFA can’t get into about 70 per cent of it.

“Victoria Valley and Mirranatwa are very strong communities and were impinged upon during the most recent Grampians fires. We’ve had to work very hard to avoid property loss this time in a highly-stocked area; primarily a fine wool-producing area. We had District 5 and 17 strike teams in there alongside local members and DSE.

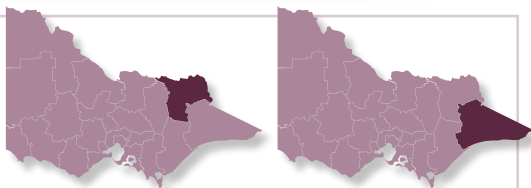
“We’re essentially flatland people in the Dundas Group and the fire behaviour has taken some getting used to,” continued Don. “It’s been very unstable and we’ve actually been getting sea breezes on the plains. The ballgame has changed.”

On 27 February, Fire Services Commissioner Craig Lapsley said the fire was contained. “It’s rare that a fire of this size and duration is contained without weather assistance. It really was the effort of the on-ground firefighters who eventually contained the fire.” ■



CHALLENGING FIRE IN ALPINE REGION

INCIDENT: Harrietville – Alpine North and South bushfire
DISTRICTS: 11, 24
DATE: 21 January 2013



Harrietville brigade Captain Gary Weston was proud of the enormous amount of work done by his crew. “We’ve never allowed fire to come into town,” Gary said. “We were out with DSE for about six hours doing the back burn and protecting the Hotham Road. Thanks to them for their efforts and to all our neighbouring brigades. They all do a fantastic job.

“We had a taskforce working with us which includes slip-ons. They helped us chase the fire around the edge of town to the property boundaries and were highly successful.

“We had five choppers working here every day and I live under the flight path. They’re noisy but necessary.”

As the fire spread and moved south, it was decided to treat it as two fires to make sure resources were used efficiently and to maximise the use of local knowledge to fight the fires.

The fire reached the perimeter of Hotham village (shown in the photo) and spot fires worked their way along the bottom of Mount Hotham. Flames higher than eight metres were pushed by 45-kilometre an hour winds, and one spot fire came within 50 metres of a chalet. However, there were no losses.

As the firefight continued, CFA, DSE, Parks Victoria, forestry industry brigades and NSW Rural Fire Service all worked alongside each other as the size of this alpine fire grew to 36,400 hectares.

After five weeks, there were still around 300 firefighters working on back burning and aircraft were water bombing, though fire activity had significantly reduced. Rain at the end of February was a boost to the firefighters.

On 27 February, Fire Services Commissioner Craig Lapsley announced that the fire was contained. “There was about 80mm of rain at Mount Hotham in the last 24 hours, which has really helped suppress fire activity,” Mr Lapsley said. “A lot of work has been put into this fire with crews completing hundreds of kilometres of containment lines and back burning.

“We would also like to say a big thank you to the crews from New Zealand and New South Wales who have provided invaluable assistance.” ■

A lightning strike at Mount Feathertop in the alpine region started a fire that was initially contained within a few hours. But the following day, strong winds pushed the fire over the control lines and a Watch and Act message was issued for residents at Davenport, Falls Creek, Hotham Heights, Harrietville and Smoko, as the fire burnt in steep, dense bushland.

An Emergency Alert phone SMS was sent to hikers on Mount Feathertop and Mount Hotham, and 37 hikers were removed from Mount Feathertop walking tracks by helicopter.

Helicopters, including Malcolm, a Sikorsky Skycrane from NSW, water-bombed the fire in hard-to-reach terrain.

After three days, firefighters had made solid progress on control lines east of Harrietville. Incident Controller Tony Lovick said the completion of control lines to protect assets was a priority.

“The key focus for us was planning for Harrietville, Hotham Heights and Falls Creek,” said Tony.

“We made use of control lines that were used in the 2003 and 2007 fires. A team of dozers worked to strengthen the lines.

“Significant progress was made constructing additional control lines between the Ovens and West Kiewa valleys to the north and north-east of the fire, and near the Great Alpine Road to the south-west.

“With much of the fire edge inaccessible, rappel firefighters were used effectively to directly attack strategic parts of the fire with the support of aircraft.”

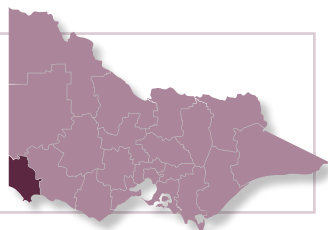
Two weeks after the fire started, firefighters carried out a 300-hectare back burn near Harrietville to protect the township.

HUGE EFFORT AT KENTBRUCK

INCIDENT: Kentbruck-Portland Nelson
Road bushfire

DISTRICT: 4

DATE: 4 January 2013



A 12,055-hectare fire burnt for several weeks in Victoria's south-west, destroying 1,200 hectares of pine plantations.

An Emergency Warning was issued as the fire travelled north towards Drik Drik. There was concern the fire could impact farming properties despite a large number of crews on the ground and aerial support working to control the blaze. This included around 475 personnel, 68 slip-ons, more than 50 tankers, six dozers, eight helicopters and three fixed-wing aircraft.

People around the Glenelg River near Kentbruck were asked to leave the area immediately.

The fire was difficult to contain because of the terrain, but the construction of strong containment lines and significant back burning over the first two weeks of the fire ensured fire activity stayed well within containment lines.

The firefight was a joint effort between CFA, forestry industry brigades, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Country Fire Services from South Australia, the State Emergency Service, Parks Victoria and Glenelg Shire Council. Thirty-four CFA strike teams helped local brigades to control the fire.

Dartmoor Group Officer Neale Emerson couldn't contain his gratitude for the crews who turned out from far and wide. "We are so grateful for the input when things went pear shaped," he said. "It confirms your faith in human nature and we had some luck on our side too. While driving around I was so



PHOTO: FRANK BELJMAN

gobsmacked. It's the biggest fire I've seen in this district but we are so lucky. There were no homes lost, no sheds lost, no stock lost."

As soon as Neale's property was safe, he became the taskforce leader of a group comprising local CFA trucks and private vehicles. "We were a ragtag army of locals," he said, "and even had someone come across the border in a private unit.

"Nelson brigade has a float pump and we took that out on a boat on the first day and today blacking out along the Glenelg River. There are some 100-foot high cliffs along the river so there's some very inhospitable terrain. You can only cross the river at Dartmoor and Nelson so you have to be very organised with your resources." ■

CELEBRATIONS PUT ON HOLD

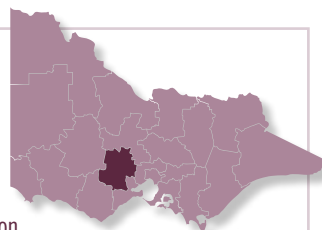
STORY CHRISTOPHER SIMMINS, NEWSTEAD BRIGADE

INCIDENT: Yandoit grass and scrub fire

DISTRICT: 15

DATE: 31 December 2012

BRIGADES: Maldon, Metcalfe, Newstead & district, Creswick, Hepburn, Daylesford, Glenlyon, Baringhup West, Franklinford, Kooroocheang Werona, Porcupine Ridge, Walmer, Moolort & Joyces Creek, Campbelltown, Guildford, Kingston, Campbells Creek, Fryerstown, Musk, Buninyong, Trentham, Leonards Hill & district



It was around 3pm on the last day of 2012. It was a warm, still and clear day and I was looking forward to the evening's celebrations with my family. Moments later my pager erupted into life: "Alert, grass and scrub fire McPhersons Lane, Yandoit".

The fire was in the Newstead brigade area and we had only one tanker in our station. Our other tanker was doing work at a fire at Metcalfe.

After a swift turnout by our remaining crew, we arrived at a rural Yandoit property to work alongside the Franklinford tanker. The two crews battled hard in among the choking smoke and leaping flames to protect the house on top of the hill, while the owners ran around in shorts beating the embers.

The grassfire quickly spread across hill and dale and moved into the dry, rocky undulating bushland. More CFA tankers, Daylesford Department of Sustainability

and Environment units and dozers attacked with gusto, chasing fingers of fire that randomly sprung up everywhere.

The sky was filled with oily black smoke and the sun was a ball of orange. Moments later five helicopters appeared, working and directing from above. Load after load of water was released with precision, eventually halting the growth of the fire.

Tired crews dragged long lengths of hose over rocky, steep ground while others manned the pumps that filled a constant stream of tankers.

In the end, 150 firefighters were needed to control the 65-hectare fire that destroyed two sheds. ■



PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER SIMMINS

SCORCHER AT BARINGHUP WEST

STORY LEITH HILLARD

INCIDENT: Baringhup West grass and scrub fire

DISTRICT: 2

DATE: 29 November 2012

BRIGADES: Baringhup West, Maldon, Carisbrook, Woodstock West, Moolort & Joyces Creek, Dunolly, Bendigo, Junortoun, Talbot, Newstead & district, Guildford, Fryerstown, Campbells Creek, Elphinstone, Castlemaine, Harcourt, Walmer, Inglewood, Tarnagulla, Rheola, Bridgewater, Murphys Creek

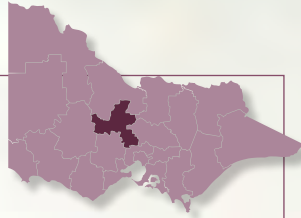


PHOTO: ALUN HUGHSON

Ten minutes after smoke was spotted from Mount Tarrengower fire tower, strike teams were activated to tackle a fire that burnt 200 hectares and killed 200 sheep. Control was quickly passed to Epsom Incident Control Centre in Bendigo where Operations Officer Chris Eagle was on duty.

"The automatic aircraft dispatch system was trialled," Chris said, "with the aircraft responding by pager just as brigades do. It worked really well and the Helitak arrived a few minutes after the first truck."

The 2,000-litre Helitak 335 was accompanied by the Cessna Bird Dog 305 carrying the air attack supervisor. Both aircraft remained at the scene for several hours. All water dropped came from nearby Cairn Curran Reservoir.

"The highlight of the incident was the way the ground crews worked really well with the Helitak," said Chris. "The fire got into some really rocky country so there were a lot of issues with access. We got a couple of graders out there early on, courtesy of the council, but trucks were really struggling with the rocks."

"The Helitak bombed the head of the fire and worked to contain the flank to keep it out of a canola crop."

Baringhup West Captain Brendan McKnight was soon on the fireground. "I was everywhere," he said. "I was talking to each of the trucks and trying to get a vantage point. Operations Officer Alun Hughson was there and the Department of Sustainability and Environment helped. The Department of Primary Industries took care of the injured sheep."

"It might not have been a windy day but the fire was creating its own wind and kept changing direction. There were some extreme conditions. A few more weeks and a bit more drying out and this one would have run all the way to Newstead," said Brendan.

Thanks to all members of strike teams who travelled long distances to support local crews. ■

CLOSE CALL FOR 100 KIDS

STORY KEITH PAKENHAM

INCIDENT: Blampied grass and scrub fire

DISTRICT: 15

DATE: 11 January 2013

BRIGADES: Newlyn Dean, Newstead & district, Creswick, Kooroocheang Werona, Daylesford, Smeaton, Hepburn, Ullina, Fryerstown, Mollonghip, Porcupine Ridge, Kingston, Guildford, Campbelltown, Campbells Creek, Maldon, Musk, Ballarat, Sebastopol, Wendouree

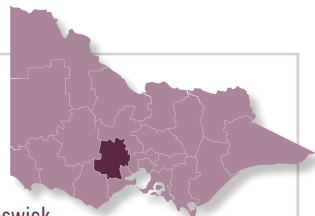


PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

In hot, windy conditions, a grass fire broke out at around 2pm near a dam in Kangaroo Hills Road, Blampied just south of Daylesford.

The strong winds sent the fire heading around Rutherford Holiday Park Farm, where around around 100 students were on a summer camp. The first call for four tankers was quickly increased to 10 as the fire passed around the holiday farm, jumped the road and headed through the cured grassland opposite.

At one stage it appeared the fire had the potential to jump the Midland Highway but crews worked hard to prevent the spread.

Additional strike teams were called in along with police and Ambulance Victoria as the fire took hold. Paramedics assessed the students for smoke inhalation.

CFA firefighters were supported by Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) units, forestry industry brigades and several private firefighting vehicles to black out the smouldering area. Only one shed was destroyed by the fire and many farm buildings and homes were saved, as well as machinery in sheds. DSE dozers did a great job putting in fire breaks around the area.

A fire stop was placed on the call at just after 8pm, though extensive blacking out continued late into the night. ■

JUNG HEADER FIRE FLARES

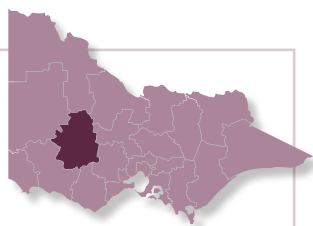
STORY LEITH HILLARD

INCIDENT: Jung grass and scrub fire

DISTRICT: 16

DATE: 29 November 2012

BRIGADES: Jung, Murtoa, Kellalac, Minyip, Rich Avon, Antwerp, Coromby, Sheep Hills, North Wimmera, Pimpinio, Dimboola, Dooen, Rupanyup, Warracknabeal, Areegra, Bangerang, Boolite, Cannum, Vectis, Lubeck, Gerang, Green Lake, Horsham



It was 43°C in Horsham and District 17 brigades were getting towards the end of a busy day of header fires when a Jung grass and scrub fire was called in just before 8pm.

Jung Captain Chris Pallot was watering the plants when the pager message came through. Chris jumped in his ute and went direct to the fire to establish the control point as incident controller.

"On the way there I heard the call go out for 'make tankers 15'," Chris said. "There was quite a strong south-westerly wind across flat plains of cropping land. This was a header fire that started in lentils and ended up going into wheat.

"When I arrived I'd say the scene was organised chaos, but it became easier to manage when I sectorised the fire.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF DSE

"I put the Murtoa FCV [field command vehicle] on the eastern sector, which was the homestead side. One appliance was on asset protection but the wind was pushing the fire away from the homestead. All trucks approaching from the east reported to the FCV. They were tasked with containing and suppressing the fire to prevent it jumping the limestone road which was a natural firebreak.

"My Dad Mal is the third deputy group officer and I made him the western sector commander. On that side the fire was about one kilometre from Henty Highway.

"Water wasn't a problem with a hydrant about two kilometres away, but the turnaround time for a tanker was about 10 minutes. It's just a timing issue when they all run out at the same time.

"It took about two hours to contain the fire which went very quickly."

The fire burnt about 180 hectares and two homesteads were threatened. They are the houses of Jung Third Lieutenant Brian Petrass and his 90-year-old father John.

"Brian and John were the first on scene," said Chris, "attending in their private unit. We also had one of the Jung brigade members in his tractor with a set of disks behind it putting in fire breaks to prevent the fire from spreading." ■

GUTSY FIREFIGHT SAVES HOUSES

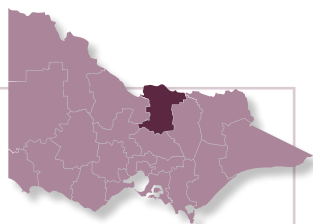
STORY LEITH HILLARD

INCIDENT: Warring grass and scrub fire

DISTRICT: 22

DATE: 19 December 2012

BRIGADES: Avenel, Kialla and District, Longwood, Murchison, Rushworth, Tatura, Miepoll, Nagambie, Locksley, Arcadia, Karramomus, Moorilim, Bailieston, Branjee, Molka, Rigg's Creek, Warring, Toolamba, Euroa, Shepparton, Mooroopna, Picola, Katunga, Waaia, Nathalia



A fire started by a header destroyed 70 hectares of wheat at Warring. "We're seeing fires take off and do some bad things on days when the Fire Danger Index is low," said Operations Officer Peter Brereton. "It was only in the teens but we haven't had decent rain for about two months.

"The usual response is five trucks but the incident controller went to 20 trucks pretty quickly because this one had the potential to run all the way to the Goulburn Valley Highway.

"The aircraft were called in within five minutes and we had four aircraft over the fire within about 25 minutes. One Helitak was from Shepparton and the other was already flying near Heathcote and diverted."

The fire headed towards a cluster of houses but a gutsy initial effort from 20 tankers secured that area.

A Level 2 incident control centre was set up at Murchison Fire Station, with Group Officer Robert Brown as incident controller and David Weidenbach from

Murchison brigade as his deputy. David was proud to have his daughter Ashlee alongside him as penciller although that doesn't seem an accurate term for someone so tech savvy who was sending video footage of the fire back to the ICC.

"The wind was running at about 15-20 kilometres an hour," said David, "which built up to 25-35 kilometres an hour and fanned it towards the south. We had three-metre high flames at one point. The fire jumped Douglas Rd and developed two heads – one on each side of the road. One head ran directly into canola stubble so crews could get on top of it and the other went into bushland.

"We had four sectors set up with one looking after machinery and one looking after aircraft. A shire grader made a mineral earth break and an excavator pushed over burning trees so crews could get in and mop up.

"We had about eight FCVs there and I can't stress enough the importance of getting them on the ground as soon as possible. Getting management in place early saves the day. You have sector command and the trucks work under their guidance.

"Another highlight was seeing the skill of the crew on the Moorilim tanker. They're predominantly wheat farmers so they're very skilled at handling stubble fires. They know how it behaves. I can't praise them enough."

A strike team from Moira catchment relieved crews after the wind change came through at about 7pm. They stayed until about 3am when a light rain fell. ■



PHOTO: WANNE RIGG



LESSONS LEARNED IN NSW STORY LEITH HILLARD

Mark Gunning from Colac brigade and Jamie Mackenzie, a senior wildfire instructor, felt like they'd been dropped in a war zone when they arrived in Nowra, New South Wales in mid January. The temperature was upwards of 45°C and there was a 75 kilometres an hour wind change.

The pair returned to Victoria full of enthusiasm about all they'd learned.

"A DSE team had been up before us so they paved the way," said Mark.

"We were really well looked after by the Rural Fire Service (RFS). They were very generous with their time.

"We were working on the Deans Gap fire which got to about 10,000 hectares. It was inland from Jervis Bay in escarpment country and there were 50 to 70-metre cliff faces. It burnt across the Princes Highway and was also burning towards parts of Morton National Park that used to be a military training area so we couldn't get in because of the unexploded ordnance." So, a few challenges, then.

"Our job was going in on foot and ground truthing the operational plans," continued Mark. "We'd check if the plans were viable based on the actual terrain and report back to the incident management team (IMT). Jamie also prepared some burn plans.

"The vegetation would change within a few 100 metres. Some parts were almost rainforest but there was a lot of dry undergrowth and the trees would carry fire across the top."

Working in hard-to-access areas gave the pair the chance to see the RFS and National Parks and Wildlife Service's Remote Area Firefighting Teams (RAFT) in action. Unlike the Department of Sustainability and Environment rappel crews, these firefighters are winched in with tools such as small axes, rakehoes and even chainsaws in their backpacks.

Mark said the RAFT crews had a level of fitness that almost rivalled the Special Air Service Regiment. The work of the RAFT crews was "phenomenal

– it was truly incredible how much they were able to achieve. They were just completely black and one of them had blood running down his face. They're tough stuff."

Although the incident management team used infra-red technology to identify hot spots from the air, the thick canopy challenged the reliability of the data, made the hot spots difficult to access and often presented crews with additional work when they arrived.

Firefighters were working with up to five Helitaks which, unlike their Victorian counterparts, don't sound a siren before the water is dropped. "Stay very alert when the Helitaks are working in your area," advised Mark.

"The differences were interesting. They used manual mapping and sometimes they might not be completely accurate but, at the same time, when the power goes out they're worth their weight in gold. That's what we faced as a result of the 75 kilometres an hour wind change when falling trees caused a power outage that shut down the IMT's computer system at a critical time in the operation.

"They had a huge operational focus whereas I'd say we have a balanced focus in our IMTs. Their incident action plans were really concise and team-focused. It meant that you knew what your neighbour was doing and there was great continuity between the sectors, divisions and units tasked on the fire. It was easy to read and easy to brief people with.

"Their IT systems were really intuitive and easy to use, too.

"By chance we met up with ex-CFA Station Officer Paul Gooley, who's now living up there and working in the local RFS headquarters, and we had a good conversation about the differences." ■

To see more images go to news.cfa.vic.gov.au/nowra



Left: Clayton Bryant from Emerald brigade and Craig Dennis from Belgrave Heights and South brigade

PHOTO: SHANE MILLER

WE'RE FROM VICTORIA, WE'RE HERE TO HELP

STORY LEITH HILLARD

Shortly after the start of bushfires in the Upper Derwent Valley and Forcett on the Tasman Peninsula, a taskforce of CFA members deployed to Tasmania from 6–11 January to help fight the fires.

Of the 64 staff and volunteers who made the journey, many joined forces with personnel from the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB), Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and Parks Victoria to form three strike teams.

Bacchus Marsh Captain Nathan Ratcliffe joined Strike Team 1 working on the Lake Repulse fire in the Upper Derwent Valley.

"We're in the Allendale Fire Brigade district," said Nathan, on the ground in Tasmania, "and we're working side by side with the brigade. We're in a combination of heavy, medium and light tankers in an area of large farms that backs on to national park. The fire has gone across many boundaries. The town has been evacuated and people haven't come home yet.

"We were approved to consolidate control lines and do a back burn with four properties at risk. It was quite successful with the fire burning right up to the control lines later in the day.

"The conditions have been hot and blustery with variable winds. It's quite different to Victoria with the fire going one way and then turning around and going another."

The CFA members arrived in Hobart and were taken to the Tasmanian Fire Service's Cambridge training college for vehicle induction before moving on to Hamilton.

The strike team was made up of members of District 15's Eureka and Bacchus Marsh groups with the senior station officer of Ballarat City as deputy strike team leader. The strike team leader was Captain Shane Cramer from Greendale brigade.

Many members of the strike team hadn't met before but, as far as Nathan was concerned, dinner and a beer on the first night gave them the chance to get to know each other.

"We're all active members," he said, "and a bit of a relaxed chat gives you the chance to find out that everyone here has the right attitude to get the job done. We're all here to help our friends.

"We've been very well received. It's unreal the way we've been treated. All 11 of us are staying in a hotel built in 1803."

Captain Shane Miller from Clematis brigade was with Strike Team 3 near Forcett on the Tasman Peninsula and they also felt appreciated. "Tasmania Fire Service members are coming up and thanking us and people are waving as we drive along," he said while in Tasmania.

His strike team was made up of five CFA members from the Dandenong Ranges and five DSE staff from the Ranges, Powelltown and Noojee.

"We're in country that's really like the foothills of the Dandy Ranges," he continued. "It's grass and light timber and we're looking after a couple of rural towns. The residents are running convoys for supplies and we've seen burnt-out houses and a school.

"There are tonnes of food and a farmer just came down to the fire station and donated a lot of peaches so we're being well looked after.

"We've done a bit of good today."

Peninsula Group Officer Tony Brown was incident controller for the Victorian contingent, and spoke to *Brigade* on his return.

"I worked on the Lake Repulse, Tasman Peninsula and Buckland fires. We went down as the Victorian taskforce – there was no CFA, MFB, DSE or Parks Vic. Everyone was that way: 'we're from Victoria. We're here to help.'

"We worked with the Tasmanian Fire Service, police, contractors, forests and parks down there. They're all very connected and they were just fantastic.

"We worked with some fire behaviour analysts including the two who came along with us from Parks Victoria and DSE. They were right almost 100 per cent of the time.

"It was also really important because we had a lot to learn about local conditions. The day started with a prevailing wind, then it would turn around 100 degrees to blow in a different direction before the prevailing wind took hold again. It was very different. It's an island; it was very hilly. The environment was quite different for us Victorians.

"We were having a lot of success running random public meetings. Our people would be out in the field and travel to fire stations and staging areas. People would start milling around because they were so hungry for information. There was no power and no communications in burnt-out areas and people were just like sponges when you provided them with information.

"We got a lot of positive feedback from the locals – the Premier and the Minister came to the incident control centre. But the people whose praise we really took to heart were the locals who'd been through the grind."

Further Victorian taskforces were deployed from 10–15 and 14–19 January and the initial taskforce returned to Tasmania later in the month. ■

To see more images and video go to news.cfa.vic.gov.au/tasmanpen

FAST WORK LIMITS WHITEHEADS CREEK FIRE STORY LEITH HILLARD

INCIDENT: Grass and scrub fire
DISTRICT: 12
DATE: 8 December 2012

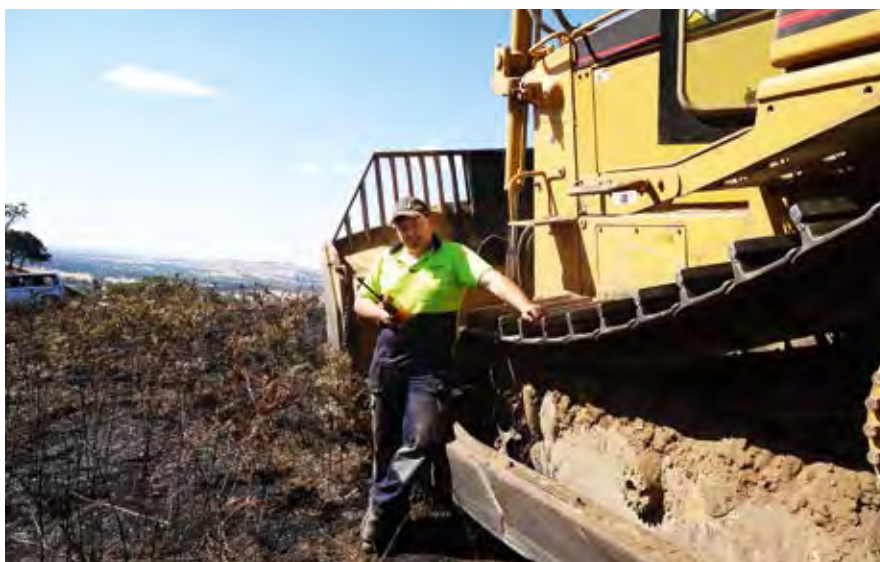
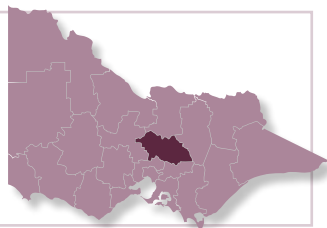


PHOTO: CHRIS HEND

Around 400 firefighters battled a 620-hectare grass and scrub fire at Whiteheads Creek, west of Seymour, for more than a day. CFA crews were called to the fire on Homewood Road just before 9.30pm. The fire is thought to have started following lightning in the afternoon.

Firefighters worked all day Sunday and until 3.30am Monday morning to reinforce the containment line. A 250-hectare blue gum plantation, 15 sheep and 50 kilometres of fences were destroyed.

Although no properties were lost, District 12 Operations Manager Peter Creak believed that this fire could have burnt 6,000 hectares if it weren't for the fantastic work of crews stopping it where they did.

"This was our first significant fire of the season," Peter said, "and a number of residences were under pressure. It was difficult, being called in after 9pm and burning in steep terrain. A southerly wind was roaring and it kept up for two days.

"The Chief came to our pre-season briefing and he emphasised, 'hit it hard, hit it fast'. That's just what we did," said Whiteheads Creek-Tarcombe Captain Scott James. Eight strike teams were brought in to help local brigades.

Whiteheads Creek-Tarcombe brigade did some steep off-roading in its 2.4C tanker through a gum tree plantation, with two long-time members also attempting to access the fire in their private farm vehicles complete with radios.

"It was difficult to assess the size in the first half an hour," said Scott. "The wind was pushing it north-west to Seymour. We got there first and put a tanker load of water on it but it was getting into the blue gums and we had to wait for it to come out the other side.

"At about 10pm we got six graders and Department of Sustainability and Environment dozers, as well as some private dozers and excavators.

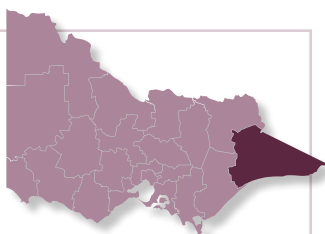
"Seymour Captain Gerard Hard and I set up a control point on Kobyboyn Road at 12.30am. That was our line in the sand – if we'd let it get past there it would have gone all the way to Avenel through the hobby farms.

"Fifty tankers attended the fire with the Helitak in by 8am the next day to check hot spots in inaccessible country." ■

Above: Private dozer contractor Greg Ryan helped contain the fire

ENSAY FIRE IN STEEP TERRAIN STORY LEITH HILLARD

INCIDENT: Grass and scrub fire
DISTRICT: 11
DATE: 4 January 2013
BRIGADES: Ensay, Swifts Creek, Sarsfield, Benambra, Mossi-Tambo, Omeo, Paynesville, Mount Taylor, Metung, Bruthen, Buchan, Bairnsdale



Gippsland crews were returning late afternoon from a fire at Kalimna West and were in wind-down mode. But just after 6pm, logs on a private property flared from a burn-off carried out in spring when it was green and damp, and started a 100-hectare fire. It took off quickly and Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) summer crews stationed at Swifts Creek jumped on to it, alongside the whole Omeo Group and a Friday night strike team from Bairnsdale.

Mack Stagg was in the Swifts Creek ICC on Friday night and all day Saturday. "Kalimna West had just finished so we were lucky to get some aircraft," he said.

"Some drops were made on the northern slope just before dark and then ground crews were sent out at night into very steep terrain. You'd have to say it was a bit of a guerrilla firefight that night. We threw everything on it. It's the CFA method of 'hit it hard, hit it fast'.

"The fire was in slip-on country and DSE slip-ons were joined the next day by a CFA slip-on strike team from Bairnsdale. We also had three dozers.

"The fire was split into two areas over the top of the mountain and was sectioned into CFA and DSE. Pete Sandy from CFA was divisional commander and he worked with Mal Smith from DSE and they were both tremendous. So were the boys on the ground. There were about 40 of them and they did a fantastic job."

District 11 Operations Manager Bryan Russell was also at the Swifts Creek ICC on Friday night. "The fire was running pretty hard early on," says Bryan. "There was good local command and control and incident management worked well from a joint management perspective.

"DSE do an exceptional job for us up here and they ran this job for us. We're short of management personnel up here but in this area it's all about joint operations and interoperability. The way the two agencies work together is something we're all very proud of." ■

WORK CONTINUES AT FISKVILLE

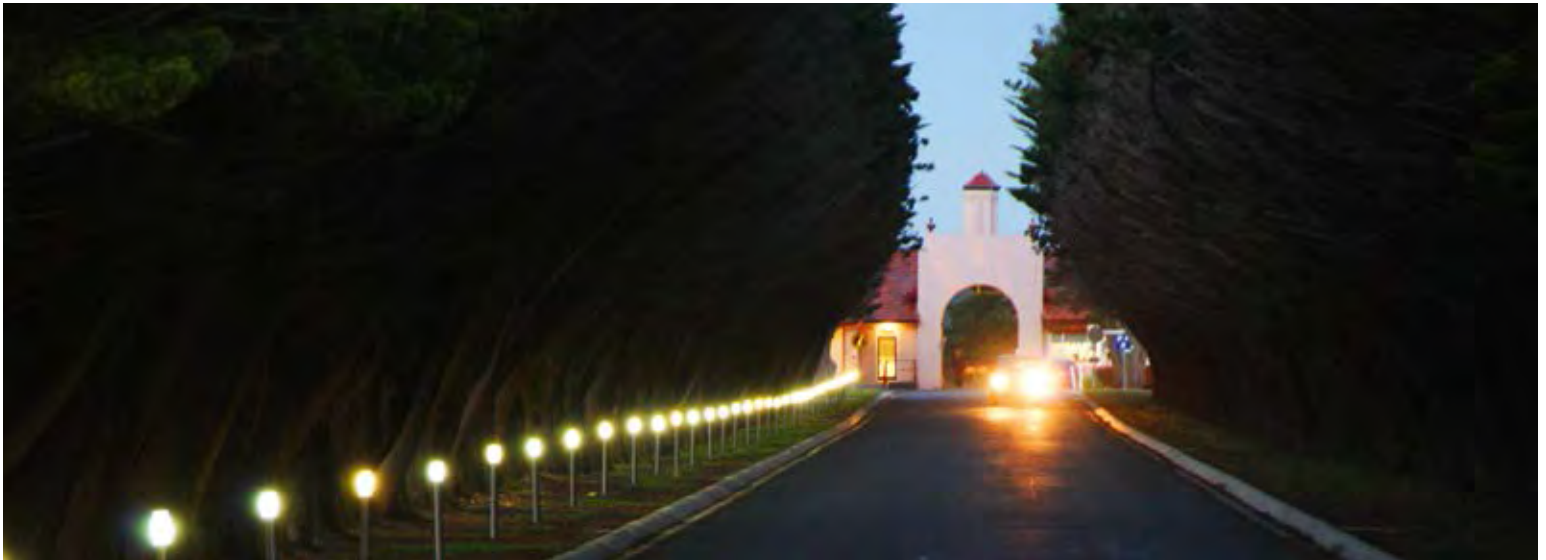


PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

In February this year, environmental engineering firm Cardno Lane Piper presented to CFA the preliminary findings of its environmental and human health assessments that began in September 2012.

Following the release of Professor Joy's report in July last year, Cardno Lane Piper was commissioned to conduct a number of different investigations at the Fiskville site including assessments of soil, groundwater, surface waters and sediments, landfills and buried drums.

The firm was also commissioned to complete a human health risk assessment and an ecological study of Lake Fiskville and downstream. These assessments are well underway and we expect them to be completed in the coming months.

Cardno Lane Piper's presentation of its findings was encouraging:

- There were no buried drums in any of the suspected areas identified by Professor Joy
- There was very minor soil contamination in two small areas on the site
- There were no risks associated with landfills
- There was no contamination of groundwater
- There was a small area of saturated soil (about 1-3 metres deep around one of the dams) containing residues from foams used in fire training. This dam is no longer used and the saturated soil poses no risk to human health.

Cardno Lane Piper will give us recommendations for remediating this area.

As part of the search for buried drums, Cardno Lane Piper conducted extensive testing via electromagnetic geophysical surveys of the three areas mentioned in Professor Joy's report – underneath the golf course, south of the airstrip and north of the reception building. No drums were found and no soil contamination was detected.

An investigation of the landfill areas involved the clearing of surface waste, installing landfill gas bores, electromagnetic surveys for drums and monitoring of landfill gas. No methane or flammable liquid drums were found and there was only minimal soil contamination. Cardno Lane Piper concluded that there's no risk from the landfills to people on site or nearby neighbours.

“THESE RESULTS PROVIDE WELCOME NEWS, BUT THERE'S STILL MORE WORK TO BE DONE”

These results provide welcome news, but there's still more work to be done.

The Professor Joy and Golder Associates reports, which were made public and posted on CFA's website in July 2012, said that Lake Fiskville contained residues from fire suppression foams used in hot fire training and that significantly diluted residues will have flowed off site into the local creek. Both reports concluded that the risks to human health associated with water and sediment moving downstream via Lake Fiskville is extremely low.

However, Professor Joy recommended that further investigation be undertaken to fully assess and quantify any potential risks downstream. Cardno Lane Piper is now working with one of Australia's leading toxicologists to complete this investigation.

Preliminary results indicate no risk to CFA personnel or site visitors and occupants from the use of the dam water for fire training. These investigations are complex and will be completed in the coming months.

As a precaution, we recommend that the current safety procedures continue, including no swimming in or drinking from dams 1 and 2. We also recommend these precautions be extended to dams 3 and 4 and Lake Fiskville, and no fishing in any of the dams or Lake Fiskville. Additional signage around all the dams and Lake Fiskville will be installed shortly.

Cardno Lane Piper also put forward its recommendations to modernise and upgrade the training water supply and treatment systems at the site. The proposed works include the following upgrades:

- Construction of a channel to divert Berembroke Creek around Lake Fiskville
- Installation of a water treatment plant to treat waste water generated during hot fire training drills to make it suitable for recirculation or discharge back into the environment (e.g. to the creek or for irrigation).

These upgrades are designed to minimise flows off site from Lake Fiskville and ensure the ongoing provision of a safe, fit-for-purpose sustainable water supply for hot fire training.

Further work is still required to design and progress works for these upgrades and this activity is well underway.

Some of our members, as well as members of the public, may be frustrated by the time taken to produce test results, but we cannot underestimate the amount of work already undertaken. The studies are time consuming but we are committed to a thorough process of investigation.

We will provide more information when the final report is delivered to CFA. ■

CFA'S ACHIEVEMENTS in 2012

Last year was a year of great successes for CFA and I'm proud of what we've achieved. Our people have brought about significant improvements to our business and for the Victorian community.

We know where we're going and how we'll get there. There have been major upgrades to our facilities, vehicles, equipment and training. We know more about our communities' attitudes and we're better at communicating with them and with each other.

This roundup gives an overview of some of the key achievements throughout the year. Thanks to everyone for their hard work.

CEO Mick Bourke



FISKVILLE INVESTIGATION

- CFA Fiskville 24-hour Health and Welfare hotline established
- Information packs with a summary of Professor Joy's report and services available delivered to affected members and families
- Medical reviews offered to members and families who registered with the hotline. 42 people have taken up the offer of a review
- Health Surveillance Program established and people in the high and medium risk groups have been contacted
- A further health study has been established in partnership with Monash University

VEHICLES

- 732 tankers retrofitted with burnover protection
- 2 mobile communications vehicles – heavy launched
- 2 mobile education units launched

For completion by June 2013:

- 24 medium tankers
- 10 heavy pumpers
- 10 heavy tankers
- 7 specialist vehicles

At the planning stage for 2012-13 VESEP program:

- 22 tankers
- 4 big fills

LAND AND BUILDINGS

- 12 fire stations built as part of the Capital Works Program
- 61 Budget and Expenditure Review Committee (BERC) funded rural fire stations built
- 8 other major BERC funded stations built
- 3 major office projects completed
- Major upgrades to two Fiskville support facilities

RADIO COMMUNICATIONS

- 15,300 digital radios delivered
- 90 sites of digital radio repeaters have been upgraded
- 1,749 transportable bag radios delivered
- Extra communications towers and mobile radio transmission repeaters have been introduced for use during fires to deal with black spots
- 22 fixed radio repeaters have been commissioned since 2009

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT

- New station wear issued to staff
- Female bushfire personal protective clothing available statewide
- 7,754 bunker boots delivered

VOLUNTEERISM AND TRAINING

- Members can now request their own ID card through CFA Online. Over 22,000 IDs have been issued
- Developed the Jones Inquiry Joint Implementation Action Plan in response to the findings and recommendations of the Independent Inquiry into the *Effect of Arrangements made by the CFA on its Volunteers*, led by David Jones
- Members are now able to transfer between brigades without having to resign
- Over 4,700 CFA members have been nominated for the National Emergency Medal
- Operational Training & Volunteerism (OT&V) launched WebTRAIN and training materials online
- 190 submissions were received in response to the Operational Training discussion paper

- Improvements to CFA training campuses, including drill areas, improved safety systems and upgrade of water storage at Fiskville
- CFA training campuses transitioned from regional management to OT&V

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

- Fire Safe Youth program was launched for secondary school students
- Key publications have been translated into over 20 different languages
- 20 culturally and linguistically diverse spokespeople have been trained to deliver bushfire education
- The Grampians community-led planning pilot project completed and has led to a statewide project
- 22 Community Liaison Bushfire Engagement presenters have been trained to deliver education programs

MEDIA AND MARKETING

- New Template Toolkit gives the organisation a consistent, professional look
- Redesign and integration of the CFA website and CFA Connect (now called News & Media)
- Two Australian Government innovation awards received for use of social media during emergencies
- CFA's Facebook page has more than 180,000 CFA friends and 20,000 Twitter followers
- A record 186 entries were received for the 2012 Fire Awareness Awards
- Almost 300 brigades participated in the second annual CFA Sunday
- CFA members raised \$1.25 million for the Good Friday Appeal 2012. CFA has raised over \$22 million since 1951
- Over 200 CFA members were trained in-house in media relations



PHOTO: KEITH PANKENHAM

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

- Completed research into defensible space and used the findings in community education programs
- Surveyed households in high-risk bushfire areas and ran follow-up focus groups looking at attitudes towards bushfire planning and intended actions
- Completed research to identify community attitudes and motivation to adopting fire safety behaviours

MEMBER COMMUNICATION

- 21 live Q&A website sessions with the Chief/CEO program were run
- More than 1,600 members took part in the CFA communications survey. The results have led to the introduction of regional director columns in *Brigade* magazine, the monthly *Weekly Times* community update and further work to improve communications between headquarters and regions
- A review of CFA publications finds substantial savings

PERFORMANCE AND STRATEGY

- The interim one-year CFA Plan 2012-2013 was released, which builds on the three-year CFA Strategic Plan 2011-2014
- CFA adopted a project management excellence framework as a guide for the management of CFA projects
- Established the Legal Activities Register, register for Memorandum of Understanding, commercial agreements and deeds

PEOPLE AND CULTURE

- The initial phases of the new organisational structure have been implemented with the new executive director team and functional teams established

- Action plans to achieve CFA's preferred culture have been established, based on the Organisational Culture Inventory survey
- Career firefighter recruitment for 2012 has been achieved and preparations for 2013 recruitment are underway
- Over 900 members completed a wellbeing survey. The results will be used to guide training

HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING

- The Safety First strategy has been updated and a new Health, Safety and Environment strategy was approved by the Board. This recognises that psychological safety is valued and promoted as much as physical safety.
- Member welfare support was provided to members impacted by the 2009 fires and 2011-12 floods
- The Volunteer Health and Wellbeing Program was delivered to 95 brigades and more than 5,000 volunteers have now participated in the program
- Conducted a review of the implications of proposed new health and safety legislation and completed a submission to Safe Work Australia
- Research into the effects of heat resulted in a scientific paper supported by Deakin University and presented at AFAC conference
- CFA was a finalist in the Institute of Public Administration Australia's Risk Management award
- CFA's first Disability Action Plan was completed

EMPLOYMENT AGREEMENTS

- Significant progress has been made on the implementation of the Operations EBA agreement. CFA and UFU have agreed on Business Rules to support the agreement

- The PTA agreement has been approved and is being implemented
- Successfully ran a MFB/CFA secondment program

OTHER FIRE AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PROJECTS

- Fit-outs of incident control centres and divisional command points completed
- One Source One Message (OSOM) was upgraded to be easier to use, and is now being used by MFB and SES
- Delivered 1,450 bushfire and Home Fire Safety Program sessions
- The *Members Quick Reference Guide* was updated based on member feedback and delivered earlier
- A Community Engagement and Fire Awareness Forum was held for 220 active members across the state. Three regional forums were also held
- Production of the *CFA in the Community* booklet. 1,000 copies were distributed to brigades
- Launch of *Landscaping for Bushfire* publication, which was distributed to all brigade captains, local councils and seven government agencies
- Over 274 brigades are actively engaged in planned bushfire prevention burns on roadsides, rail corridors, private land and other community assets. Brigades continue to assist DSE with their planned burning program
- The Victorian Bushfire Information Line has transitioned to a multi-hazard Victorian Emergency Information Line project
- A new mapping platform is available for bushfire and other natural hazards in Victoria as a result of a joint initiative between DSE and CFA. EMap combines Firemap and the CFA mapping system and education to improve welfare services
- Produced the *Victorian Fire Agency Bushfire Handbook*. ■



MICK BOURKE CEO

The trial for the Kilmore East class action began on 4 March 2013. The plaintiff, on behalf of an estimated 10,000 class members, is suing energy provider SPI Electricity for negligence. Allegations have also been made against CFA, Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), Victoria Police and SPI's line maintenance contractor UAM.

There were two allegations against CFA: the suppression case, alleging CFA failed to suppress the fire, and the warnings case, alleging CFA did not adequately warn the community. The suppression case was dismissed – with the consent of all parties – before the trial began. In dismissing the allegation, Justice Dixon stated that the dismissal “avoid[s] prosecuting a case with no real prospects of success”.

THE OPENING WEEK OF TRIAL

The Kilmore East trial opened with his Honour Justice Forrest making the point that he has not to date read any material from the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (VBRC). In his Honour's words, “the trial starts on a blank slate”. CFA's ability to raise matters during the VBRC was limited, but here we will have the opportunity to vigorously defend the warnings case.

The first opening address was on behalf of the plaintiff, Mrs Matthews, and focused on her case against SPI. Regarding CFA, DSE and Victoria Police (the state parties), her barrister told the court that Mrs Matthews joined them as defendants only because SPI did, stating that it was not her original intent and he “[did] not want it to be known that Carol Matthews wants money out of the state. She did not sue them directly.”

SPI's opening address outlined their warnings case against the state parties. SPI's barrister told the court that they “do not make any criticism of any CFA, DSE personnel or Victoria Police who may have been on the spot in particular regions” but, rather, that the case was concerned with the general level of information spread.

In the opening address on behalf of CFA, DSE and Victoria Police, our barrister emphasised the concept of shared responsibility and that, as part of the community education process about bushfire safety, communities were consistently informed that the circumstances of a fire may mean that warnings would not be able to

be given and that individuals should rely on their own judgement to make decisions about when to stay or leave.

He also emphasised the significant amount of media coverage given to the dire weather predictions in the days prior to Black Saturday, with the state parties doing their utmost to ensure that as much information as possible was spread in relation to the likely conditions on 7 February.

The opening addresses were streamed live on the internet. The remainder of the trial, however, with the exception of the closing addresses, is only available to be viewed online by those registered as members of the class.

The trial is estimated to take up to nine months.

We don't anticipate that CFA will present its evidence until after mid-2013. I have already informed a number of CFA members that they are on the current list of witnesses we intend to call to give evidence. Thank you to those people and everybody who has assisted CFA in defending these proceedings so far.

I recognise that some of you may be concerned about the proceedings and encourage you to access CFA's welfare services. You can call the CFA welfare line on 1800 628 616 to discuss what support is right for you. These services are not just for members who have been requested to give evidence but for anyone who has concerns about the trial.

MURRINDINDI CLASS ACTION AND HARKAWAY CIVIL ACTION

You may also be aware that there are two other legal proceedings CFA is involved in arising from the 2009 bushfires: the Murrindindi class action and the Harkaway civil action.

Justice Forrest has made it clear that Murrindindi will not proceed in any meaningful fashion until Kilmore East has been resolved. The trial date for the Harkaway civil action is yet to be set down. Thank you to those who are continuing to assist with the defence of these actions

For further information, FAQs are available on the CFA Intranet and Brigades Online by following these links after login: About CFA>2009 Fires>Ongoing Legal Actions. ■

To read Mick's blog go to the blog section of news.cfa.vic.gov.au

AUSTRALIA DAY HONOURS

Congratulations to CFA members recognised in the 2013 Australia Day Honours list.

MEDAL OF THE ORDER OF AUSTRALIA

Joe Cumming joined Bunyip brigade in 1946 at the age of 17 and was elected captain in 1960, a position he held for 31 years. Joe also has a 65-year service medal and a National Medal.

AUSTRALIAN FIRE SERVICE MEDAL

Manager of Executive Support James Fox has been an outstanding contributor

to CFA and the community for over 20 years. Driving significant change, he actively developed a community safety ethos within CFA through widespread CFA engagement.

Westmere Group Officer David Blackburn's outstanding contribution for more than 30 years has considerably improved the safety of the community in western Victoria through his outstanding leadership, innovation and commitment.

Since joining the Metropolitan Fire Brigade in 1989, William Rouse has consistently provided the highest level of dedication and uncompromising attention to detail in all forms of technical rope rescue work across all Victoria's emergency services. He has been a CFA volunteer since 2006. ■



PHOTO: PAUL RHEISSSET, EUROPA GAZETTE

KEEPING THE FLEET MOBILE

STORY LEITH HILLARD

From the district mechanical officer (DMO) perspective, this fire season has been characterised by field command vehicles, tankers and slip-ons tackling tough terrain and, in some cases, getting bruised in the encounter.

"Overall, the fleet handled the conditions well at the Aberfeldy fire," said Acting Officer in Charge Kelvin Gleeson at the Moe workshop. "We repaired around 15 vehicle tyres and we also rebuilt a couple of pumps. The most common maintenance required is for partially-blocked air cleaners for the vehicles and pump engines.

"Radiators have blocked up with dust and particles," said Manager of Fleet Maintenance Danny Jones. "It's important that crews monitor that for us. Do a thorough inspection when the opportunity arises, such as at crew changeover. Look for grass and debris in the radiator – you can see that quite easily. It might mean lifting the cabin of your tanker. Cosmetic damage is also more likely in this type of terrain due to unseen obstacles and tight tracks."

The DMOs will try to do a complete check of all strike team vehicles before

they leave a staging area. If that doesn't happen, there will be a complete post-fire inspection as soon as it can be scheduled. Priorities depend on geography: where the vehicle has been operating and for how long. The hardest-working vehicles will top the priority list.

"We've had two engine failures on tankers which appear to be due to overheating under some tough driving conditions," continued Danny. "Reports have also been received of brakes overheating and subsequent brake fade. Please do not attempt to cool brake components with water as this can have a severe effect on the integrity of brake components."

DMOs implemented a relief crew roster, with staff moved around the state to handle spiking workloads. They are assigned in consultation with the duty DMO, incident control centre and the fleet services duty officer. Forward planning enables DMOs to get to work at significant staging areas within 24 hours of first brigade call-out. ■

PROJECT 2016 STATION UPDATE

STORY DARREN GREVIS-JAMES

Construction of the new Rowville integrated fire station is set to begin this month. The new station, on the corner of Wellington Road and Le John Street, will include six bedrooms, a four-bay drive-through motor room, meeting room, dayroom area, ancillary spaces, training yard and car park. This station will replace the current Rowville fire station at Taylors Lane.

Meanwhile, major modifications of the Ocean Grove Fire Station near Geelong have been completed. The project has upgraded the station so that it can become an integrated station – it now has six bedrooms and extensions to the utility-turnout area.

The Rowville and Ocean Grove fire station works are both funded by Project 2016, which includes the creation of 342 additional career firefighter and officer positions in CFA. ■



Left: Ocean Grove station

PHOTO: IAN BESIMCKE

YOU'VE EARNED IT

Your Emergency Memberlink Program is just one way for us to recognise your commitment and contribution to emergency services and Victorian communities.

Through Emergency Memberlink, members can receive discounts and benefits on a wide range of products and services. In excess of 250 offers are available, with new benefits being added regularly.

Details of the offers can be found in the Emergency Memberlink Guide which is sent out with all new Memberlink Cards and on the Memberlink website www.emergencymemberlink.com.au. Be sure to visit the website regularly to keep up to date.

There are a number of ways you can access your Memberlink Benefits. These include:

- **Show your card and save** – discounts and benefits available upon presentation of your Memberlink Card at businesses throughout Victoria, and some nationally.
- **Online Shopping** – goods below RRP delivered state-wide.
- **Purchase Cards** – Safeway/Caltex, Coles, and many more Gift Cards available through your Memberlink team at 5% discount.
- **Discount Vouchers** – time limited, special offers updated regularly. Members can download these vouchers from the Memberlink website or call the Memberlink Team.

For anyone without a Memberlink Card, you can call the Memberlink Team on **1800 820 037** or register online.

More volunteers part of Emergency Memberlink

CFA and VICSES members have had access to the wonderful Emergency Memberlink benefits for nearly 10 years. 2013 sees the introduction of Emergency Memberlink Cards for St John Ambulance, Ambulance Victoria and Australian Volunteer Coast Guard.



Get more with HCF®

Emergency Memberlink Members receive a **12% discount** on HCF products through HCF's arrangement with the Victorian Public Sector. This could save you hundreds of dollars a year!

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Visit www.hcf.com.au/vps for more information.

Find out how HCF can give you more today. Contact your HCF Corporate Sales Representative, Carly Bloomfield, on 0414 559 734 or Emergencymember.link@hcf.com.au. Please quote 'Emergency Memberlink.'



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Full listing and more information call **1800 820 037** or visit www.emergencymemberlink.com.au

*Conditions apply and offers are subject to change. Valid to 31 Dec 2013.



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Members have access to State Trustees' expert Will and EPA writers in the Melbourne CBD, Dandenong and Bendigo, or at one of our regional visiting locations.

Special offer for Emergency Memberlink members:

- Up to \$110 off Will writing!
- 20% discount on Will and Enduring Power of Attorney (EPA) preparation**

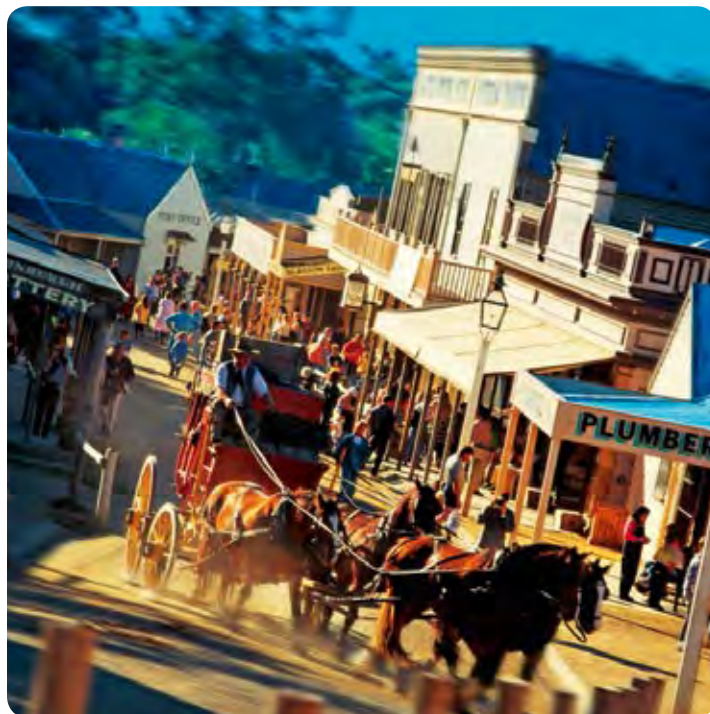
For more information or to make an appointment call 03 9667 6885 or email [sst@statetrustees.com.au](mailto:ss@statetrustees.com.au) and quote "Emergency Memberlink"

www.statetrustees.com.au

*The amount of \$110 relates to the saving on the standard fee for preparation of a Will where State Trustees is not nominated as the executor or co-executor and where the preparation time does not exceed 1.5 hours.

**20% offer is available on the preparation of Will and EPA documents only. Offer ends 01/01/2014 unless extended. The services are offered by State Trustees Ltd. ABN 68 064 593 148.

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EUAN FERGUSON CHIEF OFFICER

The 2012-13 fire season proved challenging on many levels and required an intense response. For many, it seems as if we haven't really stopped since the start of 2013.

Almost all of Victoria has experienced below average rainfall in the last four months. Many locations have experienced very much below average and some have seen the lowest on record. Many locals are telling me that it's drier than during the drought – although perhaps a different type of 'rapid onset' dryness. This is supported by observations of leaf drop and wilting or dying plants in the bush and in our gardens.

The number of vegetation fires attended by CFA to the end of January 2013 was around 230 above the seven-year average. Grassland curing is nearing 100 per cent across most of the state with the only exception being areas of the Mornington Peninsula, Bass Coast and La Trobe Valley. While there have been some large fires active for a number of weeks, namely Aberfeldy, Harrietville and the Grampians, there have also been a large number of significant short-lived grass and scrub fires.

In mid-February I said, 'we are not through the fire season yet.' Almost a month later, although summer has officially finished, we are still not through the fire season. We need to recognise that fatigue and complacency can creep up on us unexpectedly. Do not be complacent. Be wary of the sting in the tail at the end of the season.

It's important that we continue to keep in mind:

- protection and preservation of life
- timely, relevant and tailored community warnings
- protection of property and those things that are important to the community
- attack fires hard and fast, but always allow for safety first and work together.

It's also important to demonstrate empathy and respect for those we serve and to all who we work with, take care of each other, do your best and stay positive.

As always, my greatest pleasure is to visit our front line firefighters in the field. I continue to be very impressed

with the level of teamwork between CFA, DSE, Parks Victoria, Metropolitan Fire Brigade, Department of Primary Industries, Victoria Police, Department of Human Services and local government (to name a few).

I also continue to be impressed by the determination of our firefighters in the field. Consistent with our strategy of 'hit it hard, hit it fast', I've seen many examples of fast, aggressive initial attacks, using well-chosen tactics that bring a concentration of effort to great effect and in doing so, keep safety foremost.

Has it all been perfect? No. Will it ever be perfect? No. But when it goes wrong, I see highly committed and professional people – who put great value on the relationships they have with their counterparts – work hard to get it fixed and make it right.

The State Control Team has met to discuss the process for debriefing for the fire season, with a view to incorporating lessons learned for next season. This will be in addition to various reviews, reports and investigations that are already underway into major fires and a number of vehicle accidents.

A tiered debrief process will focus on what went well and how we can improve. There will also be a more focused analysis of a number of themes and priorities including warnings, evacuation, transfer of control, aircraft, incident management team readiness and community messaging.

The fireground is an inherently dangerous workplace. We have witnessed the tragic deaths of two fine DSE firefighters, Katie Peters and Steve Kadar. This should reinforce our commitment to safety. We owe it to them to keep our focus on bringing everyone home safe – every day. ■

To read Euan's blog go to the blog section of news.cfa.vic.gov.au



VFBV VOLUNTEER SURVEYS STORY PETER BEATON

Around 80 per cent of CFA volunteers are happy with their role according to the first Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) Welfare and Efficiency survey, though fewer are satisfied with the way volunteers are treated.

VFBV will repeat the survey at regular intervals to track trends in volunteers' opinions. The 33 questions measure the importance of a range of issues and how well volunteers think the issues are being handled. The series of surveys will help guide VFBV representation and CFA decisions.

The CFA Board and senior management have been invited to work collaboratively with VFBV to understand the issues and perceptions behind the survey results.

It's an opportunity to focus efforts on bridging the gap between volunteers' perceptions of current performance and expectations.

The response to the first survey late last year was fantastic, with more than 800 volunteers taking part, but we'll see the real benefits as future surveys show whether or not issues are improving over time. With the trend in survey results as a guide, efforts can be focused on those issues needing attention.

Every CFA volunteer stands to benefit from the work that flows from this survey, and all volunteers are encouraged to register now at vfbv.com.au to receive the next survey by email this month. You can see the first survey's results on the VFBV website. ■



HOW TO REGISTER

- Visit vfbv.com.au
- Go to NEXT VFBV SURVEY box on the right
- Fill in your details
- The survey will be emailed to you this month

NEW HONOURS AND AWARDS TOOLKIT

STORY **DARREN GREVIS-JAMES**

An honours and awards toolkit is now available to CFA members. It includes a manual and a colour poster (shown right) that has pictures of all medals, ribbons, badges and certificates most frequently awarded to CFA members.

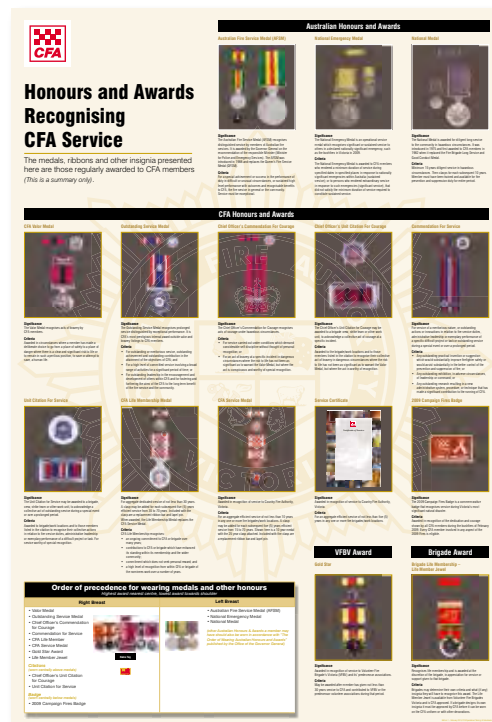
The poster gives a description of the specific criteria that must be met to receive each award, an illustration that shows how medals and awards should be worn, and guidelines for submitting nominations.

CFA Acting Chair Claire Higgins said this toolkit will make it easier to understand the breadth of awards available and how to submit a high-quality application for each.

“The Board sees this as another step in appropriately recognising the service of CFA volunteers and brigades and their contribution to the community,” Claire said. “It’s a tangible outcome of one of the important themes of the recent Jones Inquiry and subsequent report that focused on CFA’s recognition of volunteers.”

The toolkit will promote a consistent, statewide approach to recognising CFA members and the interpretation of available awards. Both the manual and the poster will be available on the Brigades Online website and the poster will be sent to all brigades.

The toolkit includes details about CFA’s newest awards that were introduced following consultation with Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria, chairs of district planning committees, CFA group officers and regional operations managers and officers. New awards and enhancements include insignia to complement commendations and ‘unit citations’ for courage, a medal set for outstanding service, and a scroll for special recognition to brigades. ■



ONLINE eMAP AN OUTSTANDING SUCCESS

STORY **DARREN GREVIS-JAMES**

The capabilities, access and features of the CFA/Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) online eMap system have proved a hit with fire and emergency service organisations, and usage of the new program has rocketed in recent months.

EMap, a sophisticated electronic online product, has transformed the way bushfire information is monitored and shared. It’s been accessed by staff from the agencies more than 3.5 million times since its launch in 2011, and it was frequently used through the fire season.

It has a range of new features and a faster load time than its predecessor Firemap. CFA’s Manager Spatial Information Services Mark Garvey said much of the eMap functionality has been created from a combination of CFA’s EIMS Mapper and DSE’s Firemap. “CFA has developed the field mapping component while DSE has built the web component,” Mark said.

EMap can be accessed at incident control centres, the State Control Centre and through DSE and CFA networks, and used as an installed application. On start-up, the network version of eMap contains two themes, one called ‘State Overview’ and another called ‘Bushfire’. The State Overview shows a wealth of

information relating to current incident activity in Victoria and the ‘Bushfire’ theme is tailored for mapping and situation officers.

One of the major benefits of eMap is that a wide range of live data adds to, and improves, situational awareness. Data such as local and interstate incidents, lightning, weather, road closures and power outages can be viewed.

“EMap is a very flexible system that can be accessed by both CFA staff and volunteers. Importantly, it takes another step towards advancing the interoperability between the agencies,” Mark said. ■



IN BRIEF

NEW RESEARCH CENTRE

A new Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) launches in July. It will receive \$47 million over eight years from the Federal Government, and will build on the work done by the Bushfire CRC over the past 10 years to conduct research into hazards including flood, earthquake, cyclone and tsunami. “Communities prone to natural hazards will continue to benefit from the new science being applied to reduce the impacts of these threats,” said the CEO of the Bushfire CRC Gary Morgan.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF KNIGHT'S ROSES

ORDER OUR NEW ROSE STORY NANCY THOMPSON

Following the success of Firestar Rose and Firestar Phoenix, CFA has a new rose in the series designed to support CFA – Firestar Spirit.

The name Spirit was chosen following a competition on our website asking members to nominate a new name.

Ken Roche, secretary of Toora brigade and Peter Taylor, operations officer from District 20, both came up with Spirit because of the rose's vibrant red flowers that stand out like so many CFA members do across Victoria.

"The word spirit embodies qualities such as courage and bravery. These are the qualities that come to mind when I consider what it takes for men and women who serve our communities as CFA volunteer firefighters," said Ken.

Peter said, "Its vibrant red flowers show such great spirit and courage like our members show and demonstrate serving and protecting our communities every day."

Congratulations to Ken and Peter who have won a bare-rooted Firestar Rose, Phoenix and Spirit.

Our newest member boasts perfectly-formed flower buds, with more than 60 buds to some stems. It has glossy, pale green foliage and scarlet red flowers. With flowers and foliage from the ground up, this rose is a standout specimen. A mild fragrance completes this disease-resistant rose.

Our three roses are now available to buy online for \$26 each, \$11.50 of which will be donated to a CFA brigade chosen by the customer. Deliveries of bare-rooted roses start next month.

For more information and to buy these roses, go to www.firestarrose.com.au. But hurry, as deliveries of the bare-rooted rose will be available only until the end of August 2013. ■

PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM

CFA has a proud history of providing high quality mental health services to its members and their families.

It's important that all members know that CFA's mental health support for members has not decreased during recent budget-saving measures. CFA recognises that firefighting can be risky and stressful and the health and welfare of emergency management employees and volunteers is an absolute priority.

Not all members would be aware that our Peer Support Program began as a grassroots movement among firefighters involved in Ash Wednesday, who recognised that they needed emotional and psychological support to deal with the traumatic elements of their roles.

The foresight shown by these members at a time when little was known about the emotional and psychological impact of trauma should not be underestimated. While research has advanced in relation to treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and other mental illnesses associated with trauma, one thing has remained constant – the critical importance and efficacy of peer support programs.

For more than 25 years, we've been operating our Peer Support Program and we have more than 150 volunteer and career peers within the network who have completed a 12-month training program. Peers travel to wherever they

are needed around the state and offer a skilled ear to help members and their families respond to traumatic and distressing events, as well as the cumulative difficulties that life sometimes throws our way. In all cases, the peer's goal is to help the individual to reconnect with their own coping skills. Where more support is required, the peer acts as a skilled navigator and networker and will help their client access other services.

But peers also offer other personalised services such as driving members to hospital appointments and visiting them in Melbourne hospitals. Many of our members will be familiar with the valuable support work that peers perform at staging areas during major incidents. Peers also accompany members to court when they have to give evidence on behalf of CFA in legal proceedings.

Members and their families can also access chaplaincy services within a pastoral care model in which all chaplains have counselling training. Psychologists can also be accessed through our Member Assistance Program (MAP), with both the psychologists and chaplains provided through external contractors to guarantee their independence.

All services are confidential, free and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Services are available through a range of channels including face-to-face meetings, online or over the phone, depending on the client's wishes. ■

SUPPORTING THE front line

STORIES LEITH HILLARD AND JASON LEIGH

Operational members rely heavily on the support of others – auxiliary groups that feed them, employers who let them leave work when the pager goes off, logistics experts and ground observers. Here are some of their stories.

TRARALGON APPRECIATES AUXILIARY

Eight members of the Traralgon brigade auxiliary have been awarded life memberships, celebrating a combined service of 232 years.

Lyn Day, Janice Eenjes, Lyn Eenjes, Joan Hill, June Membrey, Coralie Stuckey, Joan Jones and Marian Tripp received their service awards at the Traralgon annual dinner.

"We've always supported the firefighters and done whatever needed to be done. There have been a number of big fires that had us up past 11pm making sandwiches," said Janis Eenjes.

The auxiliary caters all the brigade functions: presentation evenings, peer support meetings and dances at the fire station. They also had a stand at the Traralgon races for a number of years.

First Lieutenant Ale Eenjes appreciates the auxiliary's support. "Without them doing what they do, the guys would be snonkered," said Ale.

"They've put a lot of money into the brigade through their fundraising work. They've put money toward a garage we had in the old station and chrome plating on a lot of the couplings that we used to have, as well as standpipes for hydrants," said Ale.

Lynne Day is in her third term as president and was pleased to receive her life membership.

"I joined the Traralgon auxiliary in 1978. My husband is a peer support leader and my son is also involved.

"I'd encourage everyone to get involved with their local brigade.



Left: Traralgon Auxiliary (left to right) Lyn Eenjes, Coralie Stuckey, Lyn Day, Joan Jones, Marian Tripp, Joan Hill and Janice Eenjes. Not pictured: June Membrey

PHOTO: TERRY GOODWIN

It's a great way of getting to know different people and very rewarding to be able to help the town."

Operations Officer Peter Lockwood praised the auxiliary for its contribution over the years.

"The Traralgon auxiliary is very active. The catering, coordination and organisation work they do makes them worth their weight in gold. Their cheque to fund some of the projects is always welcome," said Peter. ■

WALLY, THE STAGING AREA EXPERT

"I don't have problems – only solutions." Now that's what you want to hear from a staging area manager at the end of a 12-hour shift.

Wally Prior's upbeat attitude was a huge benefit to the people passing through the Harrietville fire staging areas. He spent the last half of his army career in logistics and as quartermaster adviser to all units right up to brigadier and general level, so organising large contingents of stores, troops and trucks is second nature to him.

"I have the happy fortune to be able to work with people," said Wally from the Bright staging area. "We have the transportable staging area office here and that's decked out with radios and photocopiers. We have cool rooms and medical personnel have a tent. I make sure all the stores and rations for firefighters and contractors are available.

"We receive vehicles in, send them out and make sure the firefighters have all they need in the way of fuel and food. They put on weight I think!

Wally retired to Eskdale and is the brigade's training officer. He was on a fire truck until the 2009 fires. "If you can't give 110 per cent on the fireline, you shouldn't be on the fireline," he said, so he jumped at the chance to do the staging area manager's course.



PHOTO: YVONNE BERRIE

He's on a long-term mission to transform the way District 24 activates its staging areas with the wholehearted support of Operations Manager Paul King.

"It's about pre-planning," Wally explained. "I've identified 22 locations that are suitable for staging areas. I've mapped them and am still in talks with some shires, encouraging them to put in some funding for things like improved access and wider gates.

"We want to set the 22 locations in concrete: have maps and photos available, have all the local contacts and resources which we'll update every 12 months."

Wally has found a satisfying way to support the front line but there's a downside: "I haven't played golf for weeks and I'm getting withdrawal." ■

GROUND OBSERVERS MAKE THE CONNECTION

Ground observers from Hume Region have been working on the Harrietville fires this season as the role continues to expand and prove its worth.

Ian Lilley has recently moved from Wangaratta brigade to become the station officer at Wodonga. This fire season, however, he was regularly stationed in one of District 23's field command vehicles with a ground observation team made up of a crew leader, a personal field information technology kit operator and a driver.

"The role is really about plugging gaps in information flow from the fireground back to the incident control centre," explained Ian. "We've been collecting data on weather, fuel loads and fuel moisture and taking photos to show fire behaviour. With the backing of Research and Development, we've been trialling a forward-looking infra-red unit which we've used in conjunction with our thermal imaging unit to check hot spots on control lines.

"It's not just getting the data but getting it to where it needs to go so the operation can run smoothly. We provide a link to divisional and sector commanders and situation officers, and the information can be so clear that it directs DSE and CFA's extinguishing efforts."

The closest bond, however, is with fire behaviour analysts from both fire agencies who tasked ground observation crews at the three major fires this season. In fact, Ian was trained in ground observation by CFA Fire Behaviour Analyst Tim Wells.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF IAN LILLEY

Ground observers also provided vital links during recent floods in the north-east. "That was very much a community assistance role," said Ian. "We carried out impact assessments on roads, bridges and properties, but we also addressed problems first hand. We came across a woman alone on a property with her cattle stuck on a hill, linked her in with the Department of Primary Industries and got them feed. We linked people in with the Department of Human Services, including people stuck away from their properties." ■

EMPLOYER RIGHT BEHIND MEMBER TURNOUT

CFA volunteers working for the City of Greater Bendigo have their employer's full support to down work tools when they receive a fire call.

"The protection and safety of our community are our highest priorities," explained the City's Director of Planning and Development Prue Mansfield. "Releasing volunteers to attend fire calls obviously serves that primary goal. It's part of our culture."

Eaglehawk Captain Eric Smith was a CFA regional officer for 20 years. He's been a volunteer for 25 years and the City's municipal fire prevention officer for 18 months. "It really goes without saying that the two roles are complementary," he said. "In my job, I assess areas of fire risk out as far as Elmore, Redesdale, Heathcote and Marong. My CFA knowledge of incident management, fuel loads and fire behaviour are all qualifications.

"On the fireground I see things that other councils are doing – they might be ideas we can use. Each role improves the way I carry out the other role."

The ultimate beneficiary of the mutual support is, of course, the community. In February, that included the Epping community where Eric responded during their fire emergency.

"I called work at 7.45am from Epping and told them I wouldn't be in. Not only was that fine with them but I was told, 'If you're tired tomorrow, don't come in'. They're really supportive of anything relating to the fire brigade. Words of encouragement like that look after me and look after the community."

Prue Mansfield believes it's a partnership that "beautifully balances two elements: it gives Eric on-the-ground experience and further builds relationships. One of the delightful things about a



Left: Prue Mansfield with Captain Eric Smith (right) and Mosquito Creek Captain Michael White (another City of Greater Bendigo employee) next to a fire plug

PHOTO: CAROL RELLY

regional city is the easy movement between agencies. There are lots of community relationships that become work relationships.

"Evidence shows that the best fire prevention comes from getting in early at the planning stage and we have Eric and other volunteers out there as our eyes and ears." ■



PHOTO: LETH HILLARD

FEEDING GROUP'S EXCELLENT BURGERS

Volunteering in an auxiliary has always been an honourable occupation but, for many years and across many brigades, that wasn't recognised.

Longstanding members of the Dandenong Ranges Feeding Group, comprising members from 15 brigades, agree they sometimes felt like second-class citizens, but that feeling is long gone.

"We're all full brigade members now," said Monbulk auxiliary's Sally Rutzou. "The Dandenong Ranges brigades are very forward thinking. The brigade captains are firm supporters of our work. CFA generally realises the value of auxiliaries so they're back to the stage of feeling useful and being appreciated."

The group is now a dynamic mix of men and women ranging in age from 19 up to 90-year-old Leny Broekhof. All members have qualifications in handling food and maintaining safety on the fireground.

"I don't do nights and I don't do hills," said Monbulk member John Nieman

who drives the car pulling the excellent Monbulk kitchen trailer when he's not operational. He's one of a number of members who moves across to the feeding group when he wants time off the fire truck.

Typically, the group is activated between 50 and 70 times a year but, by early March, had already turned out 27 times this year.

Charging very reasonable prices, recent hard-earned funds have gone towards a new refreshments trailer. Word of their excellent hamburgers (no beetroot) has spread far beyond the Ranges: there are apparently photos of their burgers on the noticeboard in a Queensland Fire Service incident control centre!

"You see people off the fireground utterly exhausted and hungry as hunters," said feeding group Secretary Sue McLaughlin. "You have to be good with people and have the ability to coax them along." ■

LILYDALE AUXILIARY'S COMMUNITY SPIRIT

Members of Lilydale auxiliary can remember all the items they've bought for the brigade – either in part or in full – going back to the 1970s.

Back then it was a pool table for the fire station, but now they are more likely to put funds towards audiovisual equipment, protective gear, a defibrillator, developing the station's courtyard, and a share of the Lilydale car that turns out with pumper strike teams.

"Ninety-nine per cent of the catering is paid for," explained Gwen Corbett, a member for 30 years and the chief shopper. "The prices are very reasonable so we don't make a huge profit. We might have three jobs in a week and we'll provide anything from breakfast or refreshments through to a roast and cater for special diets. We catered for 70 last CFA Sunday and there were 70 to 80 at our auxiliary's 50th celebrations last year.

"If you live in Lilydale and you haven't had one of our sandwiches then you're not really involved in the community."

All auxiliary members are non-operational. They enjoy fine-tuning their skills and doing courses that teach them more about CFA. The 13 members range in age from mid 30s to almost 80 with new members welcome.



PHOTO: LETH HILLARD

Left: Members of the Lilydale auxiliary (from left) Gwen Corbett, Sheryl Haley and Val Oliver

"We work very well as a team," said Val Oliver, a member for 50 years. "There's never been any friction but there have been a lot of laughs. Most of us started as young mothers and we could balance being with our children. One of us might look after a group of children, freeing the others up to cook.

"You feel proud to be part of an organisation that responds to disaster. You used to rely on your neighbours but now CFA is like that good neighbour. CFA will always be there." ■



BRAVERY AWARDS FOR KINGLAKE MEMBERS

STORY AMY SCHILDBERGER

Fifteen CFA volunteers from Kinglake brigade received bravery awards from the Royal Humane Society of Australasia in December for their efforts during the 2009 bushfires.

One of the recipients, Tricia Hill, said the group felt proud to be recognised. "It was a real feel-good day for us all. We're honoured," she said.

A Silver Medal was awarded to Diane MacLeod for driving a brigade car to a fire reported at Olive's Lane and making sure no further cars continued going south. Diane also helped protect the fire station by patrolling the area and knocking down embers and small spot fires.

Firefighter Kelly Johnson received a Silver Medal for fighting the fire and embers at Kinglake Hotel. She also collected residents who'd been injured when their home exploded, killing five people.

A Bronze Medal was awarded to Gareth Mulvey for also fighting the fire and embers at Kinglake Hotel and help to move hoses to protect the hotel, the motel units and the fire station from the south-west side.

Phillip Petschel received a Bronze Medal for setting up the quick fills in the dark in order to facilitate the work of others, and for protecting the fire station and hotel from fire on the east and south sides.

James MacLeod was awarded a Certificate of Merit for holding

the door of the fire station shut to keep the embers and smoke out while escorting residents who needed shelter. He provided first-aid and assistance to residents after the main firefront had passed and also helped repair and maintain the generator to maintain power to the station.

Carole Wilson, Maggie Mulvey, Patricia Hendrie and Fiona Stavenuiter received a Certificate of Merit for taking many calls from residents seeking information. They also handed out masks to residents to protect against smoke in the fire station and provided drinking water.

Linda Craske received a Certificate of Merit for helping to take an injured firefighter to Whittlesea for medical treatment.

The members on Kinglake Tanker 2 – Ben Hutchinson, Tricia Hill, Barry Byrne, Katherine Grinlaw and Jason Smart – received Certificates of Merit for rescuing numerous people including 12 residents in Jacksons Road. They also saw a woman and child on the road heading towards Kinglake and stopped to help them. Ben Hutchinson began first-aid on the girl putting water on her burns, while Barry Byrne and Tricia Hill held a blanket over the girl to protect her from falling embers and debris. The crew continued saving burning homes until 4am. ■

Above: Left to right, Kinglake brigade members Ben Hutchinson, Maggie Mulvey, Gareth Mulvey, Carole Wilson, Fiona Stavenuiter, Jason Smart, Patricia Hendrie, Tricia Hill, Diane MacLeod, Katherine Grinlaw, Linda Craske, Barry Byrne. Not pictured: James MacLeod, Kelly Johnson and Phillip Petschel

WYNDHAM VALE COUPLE SAVES CHILDREN

At the same awards ceremony, Wyndham Vale brigade member Lawrence Carver received the Bronze Medal and his wife Shona received the Certificate of Merit for rescuing four children in July 2009.

Lawrence was at home when his pager alerted him to a fire at the house next door. He tried to enter the house but all the doors were locked. He then tried to enter the house through an open front window, but the mother stopped him.

Lawrence could see four children in the lounge room sitting on the floor. They were unable to come to the window when

he called them because they were tied to a coffee table.

"When I saw the children were tied up, I realised how serious the situation was," said Lawrence.

The mother began squeezing a child tightly and the child began screaming. Lawrence jumped through the window and wrestled the mother to the ground.

Shona saw the children, climbed through the window, untied them and took them to her house. "Being a mother, my instinct took over and I didn't think of anything else apart from getting the children out," Shona said.

A LONG WAY TO THE TOP

STORY MEGAN ANGEL

PHOTOS: MEGAN ANGEL



Left: CFA members from Lara, Leopold, Bayswater and Werribee

It's not surprising the Eureka Climb generates quite a bit of interest from CFA members. We love to raise money for a good cause, we're always looking for a new challenge and when you throw in some healthy competition the Eureka Climb definitely ticks all the boxes.

In last year's race up the 1,642 stairs and 88 floors of the Eureka Tower, Melbourne, in mid November, 2,497 competitors raised more than \$300,000 for two charities – Interplast and Whitelion – that help disadvantaged young people.

Forty-six CFA members took part from Upwey, Bayswater, Leopold, Lara, Werribee, Doreen, Pakenham, South Warrandyte, Cranbourne, Point Cook and Springvale brigades. Between them, they raised an impressive \$8,000.

Committee members from CFA's Sports and Recreation Association attended the event to present all CFA participants with a sports cap especially designed for the event. The caps were embroidered with the CFASRA logo and 'Eureka Climb'.

CFA Sports and Recreation Association congratulates all the CFA members who participated, especially Springvale brigade Team 2 (who finished third in the Emergency Services Team Challenge), Pakenham brigade Team 1 (seventh) and Springvale Team 1 (eighth).

Springvale's Station Officer Matt Jones put in a great effort to race to the top of the tower in 11 minutes and 21 seconds. And Upwey brigade firefighter Noel Nealon managed to get to the 67th floor in structural gear and breathing apparatus before the cylinder ran out.

"The event was a great get together for people in the emergency services," Noel said. ■

For more information about the Eureka Climb and how to take part this year, go to eurekaclimb.com.au. When registering please include 'CFA' with your name so we can keep track of how many members take part.

Below: Member of Parliament Terry Mulder and Kawarren Captain Peter McDonald at the opening of the station

KAWARREN CELEBRATES NEW STATION

STORY ANNIE HERITAGE

On a beautiful sunny day, Kawarren brigade, south of Colac, celebrated the opening of its new station with the community in late November.

Member for Polwarth, Terry Mulder, officially opened the new station. The attendees included Colac Otway Shire Mayor Lyn Russell, Shire Councillors Stephen Hart and Brian Crook, CFA District 6 Operations Manager Nigel Parsons, CFA Board member Michael Tudball and Kawarren Captain Peter McDonald.

The day began in the new station when Nigel Parsons welcomed everyone.

Michael Tudball spoke about the importance of new fire stations in the district and acknowledged the wonderful efforts CFA volunteers contribute to their communities.

Peter made a speech and thanked everyone for their involvement in making this day so successful. Special thanks went to brigade members and their families for their continuing support.

Everyone then enjoyed a delicious barbecue lunch.

The day was considered to be a huge success. A special mention needs to be made to member Keith Armistead, who supplied CFA with a fantastic history of the brigade. ■



PHOTO: ANNIE HERITAGE

IN BRIEF

DOUBLE DELIGHT

Yellingbo brigade welcomed CFA Chief Officer Euan Ferguson at the beginning of December for the official handover of the brigade's new Nissan ultralight tanker and Isuzu light tanker.

Captain Paul Spinks commented that both these vehicles are ideal for operations throughout Yellingbo on the undulating farmlands, and will help protect the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve that's home to the endangered helmeted honeyeater bird and Leadbeater's possum.



JEPARIT'S FIRST RESPONDERS

STORY DARREN GREVIS-JAMES

Jeparit brigade could be described as one of the best fire and emergency service providers in regional Victoria when it comes to serving its local community. That's because it provides medical support through its First Responder ambulance, as well as responding to fires.

Jeparit brigade includes six members who form the First Responder team. This unit is on call around the clock, every day of the year, and two members are always rostered to respond to local calls for an ambulance.

Jeparit's team is made up entirely from CFA volunteer firefighters who have completed level 3+ first-aid training for first responders and have a licence to practise emergency first aid. They must then maintain that level of skill by doing at least 50 hours of training every year.

Ex Captain Chris Rosewall, who is now first lieutenant and leads the Jeparit First Responders, said the team attends around 200 calls a year compared to about 50 fire calls.

Chris said the First Responder team members are on a 10/14 roster. "They can and do turn out with the brigade to fire and other emergency calls but their main role is for events requiring ambulance attendance. It can be quite a lot of work as the team can turn out many times a week and then it may be quiet for a while," Chris said.

The Jeparit First Responder team responds to all code one and two medical emergencies within a 40-kilometre radius of Jeparit. It can go a greater distance if needed. The team is always backed up by paid staff from

Ambulance Victoria in the nearest ambulance available, which is likely to be at Horsham approximately 75 kilometres away. Chris points out that the CFA ambulance is only used as a first response vehicle and not for transporting patients, which is handled by Ambulance Victoria.

The First Responder team was formed about eight years ago following an accident on Christmas Day when a young boy was injured while riding a motorbike on private property in the district. At that time, the nearest ambulance was at Horsham, almost an hour's drive from Jeparit.

"He had to wait more than an hour for an ambulance to assist due to the long distances in this part of the Wimmera region. So we decided that we needed to do something to improve our first responder service for injured or sick patients," said Chris.

The First Responder team is managed by Ambulance Victoria's Sandy Kahn, who's the team manager for the Grampians region.

Chris said that having a First Responder team in a town the size of Jeparit is a major plus for the whole district.

"If the team can get to a job in around eight minutes and it takes the full-time ambulance officers anything up to 45 minutes to get on scene, it can only be a benefit to the people of our area," he said.

"In small towns like Jeparit, we look after ourselves and our community; you can't rely on others to help out all the time, as is the case in some parts of country Victoria." ■

URBAN CHAMPS AT WARRNAMBOOL

STORY **NANCY THOMPSON**

This year the Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) Urban Junior and Senior Championships were held in Warrnambool.

The events were a great success with each one drawing up to 3,000 competitors, supporters and officials to the town, including teams from Western Australia.

Spectators also enjoyed plenty of action, with competitors taking part in events designed to build speed and fundamental skills with firefighting equipment, and to promote teamwork, leadership and a healthy lifestyle. A key component of the Juniors is to promote volunteerism and membership of brigades.

This year's Urban Champs coincided with Warrnambool brigade's 150th anniversary year.

David Ferguson, member of the local organising committee said, "It's great to see so many members from across the state all participating and having fun. Congratulations to the Benalla A team for coming first at the Juniors and Kangaroo Flat team for winning the Seniors. Warrnambool brigade appreciated the support of VFBV, CFA and the City of Warrnambool in helping to host the events."

The CFA exhibit also offered members the chance to buy the latest corporate merchandise and get health checks. The CFA education buses and mobile training units were also on hand for members to visit, and the Community Engagement team held a pantomime for the kids, complete with Beepa, Captain Koala and April Himmelreich, our Moomba Queen. ■

PHOTO: BLAIR DELEMIN



PHOTO: MARY ANNE EGAN



URBAN JUNIOR RESULTS

Dry Aggregate		
1st	Benalla A	37 points
2nd	Sale A	23 points
3rd	Esperance A	17 points

Wet Aggregate		
1st	Tatura A	27 points
2nd	Wendouree	16 points
3rd =	Sale A, Pyramid Hill, Moe A, Tatura B	13 points

Under 14 Years Aggregate		
1st	Tatura A	32 points
2nd	Sale A	31 points
3rd	Moe A	22 points

Under 17 Years Aggregate		
1st	Benalla A	34 points
2nd	Wendouree	27 points
3rd =	Esperance A, Pyramid Hill	15 points

Grand Aggregate		
1st	Benalla A	48 points
2nd	Tatura A	43 points
3rd	Sale A	36 points

URBAN SENIOR RESULTS

Dry Aggregate		
1st	Bassendean	21 points
2nd	Maryvale	15 points
3rd	Drouin/Bunyip	13 points

Wet Aggregate		
1st	Kangaroo Flat	62 points
2nd	Kyneton	54 points
3rd	Horsham	48 points

A Section		
1st	Kangaroo Flat	73 points
2nd	Bassendean	67 points
3rd	Drouin/Bunyip	42 points

B Section		
1st	Euroa	60 points
2nd	Bairnsdale/Lakes Entrance	52 points
3rd	Mornington	34 points

C Section		
1st	Horsham	67 points
2nd	Kyneton	54 points
3rd	Benalla	48 points



BOB BARRY
BARWON SOUTH WEST
REGIONAL DIRECTOR

By the final day of summer, the Victoria Valley Complex fire had been burning for 13 days with only a light sprinkling of rain over the fireground. South-west Victoria is one of the driest parts of the state and many areas have had no significant rain since last September. That's led to some unusual fire activity and behaviour that has really tested us through large and long-duration fires such as Kentbruck and this one in the southern Grampians.

In addition to fires sparked by lightning or farm machinery, we've had an increase in arson activity and that has got us more involved in Operation Firesetter, Victoria Police's crackdown on bushfire arson with its emphasis on prevention. This operation works in conjunction with Crimestoppers to raise community awareness of arson. We're right behind an initiative that encourages early reporting so our hard-working crews are not turning out to deliberately-lit fires and crime scenes.

An enormous amount of excellent work has been done by Barwon South West volunteers and staff. No doubt the speed and force of attack have been instrumental in limiting losses. You have 'hit it hard, hit it fast' and achieved the CFA aim of protecting lives, property and the environment.

I speak on behalf of CFA, but no doubt I voice the thoughts of our Barwon South West communities when I say a heartfelt thank you for your tireless efforts. Members have made an immense contribution on the fireground, at incident control centres and at regional control level. Some of you served on strike teams or incident management at the Harrietville and Aberfeldy fires, while others were deployed to Tasmania and New South Wales.

In turn, I extend my thanks to our neighbouring districts and those on CFA strike teams who responded to Barwon South West region when we needed you. We've also been the grateful hosts of some dedicated firefighters from New South Wales and New Zealand. This influx of people from outside the area is crucial to help locals manage their fatigue and allow them to get home, take care of their own properties and recuperate.

It's been a tough fire season but our emergency services have stood together. We've had excellent support from VicSES, DSE and Parks Victoria, and councils have thrown their energies into supporting the fire agencies. We also pay tribute to all the government agencies that have supported us at regional and incident levels. Together we can reflect on the losses averted and the lives saved.

Dartmoor Group Officer Neale Emerson certainly reflected along those lines when he spoke to me about the Kentbruck fire response. He said that he may have missed a few meals but, on balance, he was grateful for the support; aware of how much had been saved, and inspired by the hard work of complete strangers that had made all the difference. ■



MARK POTTER
GIPPSLAND REGIONAL
DIRECTOR

Thank you!
Gippsland members have been responding to bushfires since the beginning of January. As I write this column, we've supported both Tasmania and New South Wales in battling their bushfires and spent in excess of eight weeks responding to major bushfires in our own backyard, while still managing to respond to all the other fires and emergencies on a daily basis. This is an effort that is genuinely appreciated by our communities.

It's important to acknowledge the significant support provided to Gippsland from all areas of the state. On behalf of our members and communities, I extend our sincere appreciation for your dedicated approach to make our communities safer. I acknowledge that a number of you may have felt less utilised than you could have been, but your presence alone has supported our communities to recover from these bushfires.

I've had a number of opportunities to travel throughout Gippsland over the past months attending community meetings in Omeo and Stratford, visiting incident control centres at Swifts Creek, Heyfield and Erica, and the regional control centre at Traralgon. I've witnessed CFA members working closely with our fellow agencies including DSE and Parks Victoria. The team approach to managing these bushfires and the commitment to work together to achieve a positive outcome was visible at all times. I was very impressed by the brigade captains at Omeo and Stratford who, with no hesitation, stood in front of their communities and informed them of the current bushfire threat and what the locals could do to protect themselves. In Omeo this was around 100 people and in Stratford the number easily exceeded 200. The feedback I received from these meetings was highly positive and this was partly due to the local voice keeping them informed.

Unfortunately, responding to emergencies, in particular bushfires, is a dangerous activity. It again demonstrates the importance of training, skills maintenance and other activities that better develop our personal understanding of the risks we may face. I cannot emphasise enough to all CFA members that training is critical in everything we do. Training doesn't need to be a formal presentation by a qualified trainer – it can be a group of CFA members who get together and share experiences and learnings with the aim of improving their own knowledge. Do this regularly and you will be surprised at the new information you will gather.

With a high level of activity always comes the challenge of managing mental and physical fatigue. I encourage you all to recognise your personal indicators of fatigue and do something about it now. By managing our fatigue levels we'll be able to better respond to future challenges. It's also important for us to support our mates and fellow CFA members when you suspect they are fatigued and require support. Do not hesitate to seek support for yourself or colleagues immediately. ■

Twitter – gipps_potzii



PATRICK O'BRIEN
LODDON MALLEE
REGIONAL DIRECTOR

Experiences in LMR so far this year have caused me to reflect on what I believe to be the three best aspects of CFA: the people, the people and the people.

I think CFA leaders at all levels, as do leaders in all organisations, run a constant risk of taking CFA's people for granted. That doesn't mean that they are always taken for granted, but I think we need to regularly stop and assess our attitude or approach to the team and we can do that by asking ourselves some questions. We might include the following when we reflect on our personal leadership style:

- Am I so bound up in pursuing my objectives that I have forgotten to consider my personal impact, or that of my actions, on others?
- Do I actually believe that the views of team members are important and do I go out of my way to gain them? Do I believe that people are of the first importance and that, by seeking their input, not only do I gain team ownership and a better outcome but discover that this is a tangible and sincere means of demonstrating my respect for the team?
- Do I focus on those parts of my job that I'm most comfortable with to the detriment of team members? In other words, do I prefer and emphasise the mechanics to the dynamics of leadership?
- Is my role so important that I must do it all myself and can't bring myself to delegate any part of that role to others?
- Do I really believe that, as a leader, I can only achieve anything of worth, or that will be enduring, by myself?
- Am I really looking after the team? Is my concern what concerns them? Am I helping them to solve problems?

Prompting these thoughts has been a personal reminder of the value every individual brings to the team. Only when we seriously reflect on the extraordinary range of skills and life experiences we can find in every brigade or team in CFA do we have a chance of appreciating each individual. That appreciation will prompt us to value difference and to encourage every member to give his or her best. We are fortunate to have many very highly gifted people in our teams.

Of course when I refer to gifts I'm using the widest possible definition. We should appreciate the gifts of practicality, experience, wisdom, common sense, mentoring, thinking, doing, encouraging, supporting, constancy, integrity, courage, commitment, perseverance as much as we do gifts of intelligence, sporting prowess, good looks or energy. We will find all these gifts and more in every team; we simply have to look for them.

Finally, for our own sake and that of the team, let's all celebrate the fact that we are surrounded by gifted people and take the time to acknowledge and thank them for their contributions. ■



DAVID BAKER
EASTERN METROPOLITAN
REGIONAL DIRECTOR

As I write this column, Victoria continues to battle bushfires on various fronts. As our state meets the challenge, our colleagues across the nation also maintain a war footing as they work hard to protect their own communities.

I'm proud of the contribution made by Eastern Metropolitan region members over the last few months, who have travelled within and outside the state to serve diligently alongside other emergency services.

In the midst of increased response activity, I'm encouraged to see our local brigades still committing to community engagement efforts. More community members are attending Fire Ready Victoria sessions and engagement events with their local brigades. Never forget that this work is as important as getting your truck out the door to respond to a fire.

The Regional Community Capability Team has continued to maintain its focus on service delivery within the region. To demonstrate its commitment to a fresh approach to this valuable work, the team developed and signed on to a 2012/2013 Summer Intent.

The Summer Intent makes the following statements:

- Key community safety messages will be delivered to targeted community members
- Brigades will be in control of local community engagement activities and events
- Region staff will support brigades.

This is definitely a case of 'less is more'. In three concise statements the team has dramatically shifted who shapes the service delivery and how support is provided.

In line with the overall direction of CFA's Creating Our Future Together, the Chief Officer and his leadership team agreed in December 2012 to implement new teams at the regional level. These changes are consistent with recent corporate changes and reflect the contemporary approach to CFA service delivery.

Accordingly, I authorised the following changes to take effect in the region from 1 January 2013. We will no longer have a Community Safety department or Operations department in Eastern Metropolitan region. The two functions will join together to become a single Fire and Emergency Management team with distinct, yet complementary, portfolio responsibilities.

The regional Command and Control team will become Fire and Emergency Management (Emergency Management Planning) team, the District Operations team will become Fire and Emergency Management (Readiness and Response) team, and the regional Community Safety team will become Fire and Emergency Management (Community Capability) team.

As we work through the remainder of the season, don't forget to look after your welfare and those around you.

During difficult times your personal resilience will make the difference in how you cope. Don't forget your training, the welfare support available and that you're part of a big team at CFA that is focused on the right outcomes. Most of all, remain realistic and positive about the part you play. ■



DON KELLY
GRAMPIANS REGIONAL DIRECTOR

It is now time to reflect on the control priorities as issued by Fire Services Commissioner Craig Lapsley. It's appropriate for us to judge ourselves against these criteria so we are going to review our performance this fire season against these measures:

- Protection and preservation of life is paramount. This includes safety of emergency services personnel, and safety of community members including vulnerable community members and visitors/tourists in the incident area
- Issuing of community information and community warnings detailing incident information that is timely, relevant and tailored to assist community members make informed decisions about their safety
- Protection of critical infrastructure and community assets that supports community resilience
- Protection of residential property
- Protection of assets supporting individual livelihoods and economic production that supports individual and community financial sustainability
- Protection of environmental and conservation assets that considers the cultural, biodiversity, and social values of the environment.

Cooperation between CFA and DSE has been outstanding. There are many examples of excellent interoperability and timely transfer of control from local control to ICC level 3.

Aircraft have been used effectively with immediate heavy ground and air attack containing potentially dangerous fires to minimum damage.

All CFA and DSE members should be up to date with knowledge of warning, alerts, Neighbourhood Safer Places (NSP), etc, as the concepts have not yet been fully understood by the public. This confusion has been referred back to the Fire Services Commissioner and CFA for future consideration.

Keep up the good work and continue to keep your communities safe. ■



ALAN DAVIES
HUME REGIONAL DIRECTOR

This fire season has certainly been a reality check as to what a typically long, hot and arduous summer in the north-east brings, following what could be deemed to be two very mild summers.

Our high state of preparedness has proven to be the key to successful fire management to date, with an initial heavy weight of attack. The rapid establishment of the fireground command structure, with timely transition to the local command facility (Div Comm) when necessary, has been terrific.

Most of our fires with serious potential were held to between 50 and 200 hectares despite the severe weather conditions. Rock solid support and leadership from the districts, region and level 3 incident management teams to our members on the fireground, and timely and appropriate advice to communities at risk will continue to be our focus. Thank you for your excellent work.

I would like to continue with the training theme that I discussed in my previous column. Hume region plans to improve its systems and processes, with the goal to produce a brigade training needs analysis that will be aggregated at catchment, district and region levels. This work is now well advanced, and is being facilitated by our catchment officers with direct input from the brigade management team.

When this work is completed, there will be a three-stage analysis of each brigade member's availability based on daytime, evening and weekends. The analysis will also identify individual's competencies overlayed on the brigade's risk profile. This will identify the training gap or perhaps a personnel gap (in which case targeted recruitment becomes the issue).

This data, which has been collected over the past two years via the brigade operational skills plan, will be presented in a way that can be easily interpreted by each brigade to identify the training needs. We will then be getting close to an evidence-based training plan (skills acquisition) for each brigade.

Along with this analysis will come the inevitable questions. What is the minimum and maximum number of firefighters in a brigade based on risk? Where are we at with skills maintenance? What is the pathway to achieve competencies in a timely manner?

I would like to emphasise that we will continue to provide a strong emphasis on growing and maintaining our volunteer instructor and assessor capacity and take training as close as possible to our members.

I anticipate that this data will be available for distribution to each captain during April.

From an incident management perspective, our catchment teams have been working with groups and districts to identify members who can take on incident management roles. In some instances, the pathway is clearly identified and in other instances that pathway is yet to be established pending CFA/DSE/MFB/SES endorsement of the process. Catchment teams are the contact point for skills acquisition processes for any incident management competencies. ■



PETER SCHMIDT
SOUTHERN METROPOLITAN
REGIONAL DIRECTOR

The 2012-13 summer fire season has been a very challenging one for CFA across the state. The Southern Metro response has been one of great diversity due to a rapid onset of fires in early January at a local level. There were an above average number of incidents that challenged crews. High and dry fuel loads led to rapid fire development, often in and around built-up areas. Great work by crews saw virtually no built property loss.

In addition to our local activity that demanded resourcing at all levels, there were constant requests for us to support other parts of Victoria such as Corryong, Dargo, Donnybrook, Grampians, Harrietville, Heyfield, Heywood, Hotham, Swifts Creek, Thorpdale and Traralgon, and interstate to Tasmania and Tarcutta and Shoalhaven in NSW. In all, 1,939 SMR people committed to strike teams, incident management teams and specialist deployments outside the region that equated to 4,100 days to the end of February. This is an incredible investment of time that our people provided to support those in sometimes very distant communities.

We must not lose sight of the dedicated efforts of our brigades, groups, group duty officers, district control centre and regional control centre personnel, resource unit volunteers and staff together with rostered duty officers who managed and supported this very significant logistical effort.

A big thank you to you all for such a dedicated and professional effort.

During the fire season activity the region was also honoured to host the Ash Wednesday 30th Anniversary Memorial Service at St John's Anglican Church in Upper Beaconsfield. The service was attended by approximately 600 people including the Governor, Premier, CFA Board and executives and many other distinguished guests. However, no one present was more important than the many family members of firefighters who paid the ultimate sacrifice during those fires and the large number of veterans from the time.

It was also a good time to reflect on the learnings of Ash Wednesday and just how far CFA has evolved and improved since that tragic event.

My congratulations and thanks to all involved in organising and supporting the service on the day, including the Upper Beaconsfield brigade, brigade captains from Nar Nar Goon, Narre Warren, Panton Hills and Upper Beaconsfield who completed readings, District 8 Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria Council, staff from our headquarters and region, and neighbouring brigades. The moving service was a great tribute to all involved in those fires and it has no doubt enabled many directly impacted by the events of Ash Wednesday to move on at least a little more. ■



GREG ESNOUF
NORTHERN AND WESTERN
METROPOLITAN REGIONAL DIRECTOR

Like everyone else in CFA, Northern and Western Metropolitan region has been involved extensively in incident management since early January, both with very active fast-running fires in the region, and extensive support by strike teams and incident management personnel into south-west Victoria, Gippsland, New South Wales and Tasmania.

More recently, the region experienced its largest interface fire in many years with the 2,000-hectare Kalkallo-Donnybrook fire. The response was a great cooperative effort across all emergency services.

I would like to thank everyone for their enthusiastic support and patience as we go through what has turned out to be a very busy fire season, and hopefully the recent rain will give us all a well-earned breather. I have been proud to observe the highly professional and committed response of brigades and staff from around the region during this period. Thank you all.

An interesting observation since the fires in the region is the increased community participation in Fire Ready Victoria meetings. In one location, where not a single person had turned up for sessions in the last two years, more than 100 people attended a session held a week after a local fire. There are similar stories elsewhere in the region. This shows the challenges we face with our community education campaigns.

In the shadow of the tragic deaths of three DSE firefighters over the last few months, coupled with the memories invoked by the 30th anniversary of the Ash Wednesday fires where 13 CFA volunteers including five from Panton Hill brigade lost their lives, I would also remind you to stay safe and look after yourselves and your colleagues. I remind you of the importance of key safety messages, such as keeping yourself well hydrated and wearing seat belts wherever possible.

The Victorian Government recently announced the purchase by CFA of land at Brougham Street, Eltham, for a new fire station. This announcement brings to an end many years of searching for a site to replace the existing station. A brigade building committee has been formed and architects appointed. Concept plans are currently being developed prior to public consultation and submission to the planning process. Given the scale of the project and the complex planning environment in Eltham, it's not anticipated that the station will be finished until late 2014 at the earliest. I would like to thank all members of Eltham brigade for their patience over the years and at last we have a way forward. ■

UPDATE ON OT&V INITIATIVES

STORY **DARREN GREVIS-JAMES**

OPERATIONAL TRAINING STRATEGY A STEP CLOSER

CFA's future Operational Training Strategy has moved a step closer following wide consultation with members and circulation of a discussion paper last year.

Executive Manager of Training Development James Stitz said CFA members identified several areas that could lead to an improvement in training: consistency, access, flexible training delivery and improved training materials.

He said the feedback from that consultation has both informed and set the direction for the development of the strategy. "It will guide how we'll improve our training systems, the processes and the way it will be carried out across all CFA," James said.

A proposed strategy is now being prepared and is expected to be introduced during 2013.

Work is progressing on the review of CFA's Minimum Skills program. Currently, the minimum skills standards are based around competency required for bush firefighting. This focus may be adjusted to adopt an all-hazards skills program that better recognises the types of incident that members are exposed to as part of their brigade's normal day-to-day operations.

MOBILE PROPS IN THE FIELD

CFA's three new prototype mobile training props are now being evaluated by fire brigades across the state.

Operational Training and Volunteerism (OT&V) Training Delivery Manager Craig Ferguson said the mobile props are unique for CFA. "We've never had this type of training equipment before where we've had the ability to take simulated structural fire training directly to brigades," Craig said. "These new training assets will assist volunteers to achieve proficiency in operational skills and support operational skills maintenance by simulating appropriate fire environments such as heat and smoke scenarios."

The three mobile training props are designed to replicate a fire in various training scenarios. The vehicle prop replicates a car fire in an open garage, the house training prop features a kitchen and lounge room, and the third unit imitates a small industrial scenario. The props are made from steel, mounted on a swing-out frame and built on a transportable shipping container-style platform, six metres long by 2.4 metres wide.

Project Manager Training Infrastructure Leona Latcham said the props give volunteers greatly improved access to realistic, safe and effective operational training opportunities. "Each of the prototype props will be cycled through the CFA regions to give as many volunteers as possible an opportunity to be part of the evaluation process."

Training and evaluation will be coordinated by the OT&V team with regional training teams helping to select the brigades that will take part in the program.

TRAINING CAMPUSES GET BETTER FACILITIES

Tenders have been released for the construction and installation of a range of new amenities at five CFA training campuses.

Works will include new classrooms, first-aid rooms, bathrooms, dining facilities, and a state-of-the-art breathing apparatus re-fill station that has a practical area for training in the assembly, fitting and use of breathing apparatus.

Campuses at West Sale, Huntly, Penshurst, Wangaratta and Longerenong are all on the schedule for the new infrastructure works.

OT&V Executive Director Lex de Man said it's been many years since the training campuses have had any major upgrade of amenities, so the work is well overdue.

"It's going to be very good for brigades across the regions who will soon have



PHOTO: BLAIR DELEMUN

access to much improved facilities. This will assist in both skills acquisition and skills maintenance," Lex said.

"An added bonus for brigades is that they will be able to book and access classrooms and other facilities for out-of-hours activities."

The total value of the work across the five campuses is around \$3.1 million.

Lex said funding for the training campus upgrade project and the mobile props flows from the Volunteer Support Package; a series of programs that recognises and supports the volunteer service delivery model.

Meanwhile, planning and proposed development of the planned Sunraysia training campus at Mildura is now well advanced. This new CFA training campus will be sited just south of Mildura airport and is expected to be operating towards the end of 2013. ■

DISTRICT 4 BRIGADES BRUSH UP THEIR SKILLS

STORY SHARON MIFSUD

There are a number of brigades in District 4 that aren't particularly active. Some of these small rural brigades don't have many members and they might only have a turnout once every couple of years.

This is not such a bad thing as the fewer incidents we have is always a good thing. However, the skills maintenance of these volunteers is something that can sometimes be forgotten.

A recent training session to refresh basic skills and to get familiar with recent operational changes to vehicles was very successful. Hotspur, Digby, Condah, Lyons and Myamyn brigades met at Crawford River to participate in some refresher training.

There were demonstrations of the new retrofit turnover system, a brush-up on communications with a discussion about the new radios, draughting techniques and basic survival skills that can be forgotten when not used often. It was also a good opportunity to make sure that everything was working the way it should.

It was great to see such a good turnout from all brigades involved. We hope that this will become a regular event. A big thank you to Brian Brady, Darren Hoggan, Peter Sutton, Ian Hamley, Bob Watson, Rick Hoggan and Mark Saunders for delivering the training. ■



PHOTO: SHARON MIFSUD

LARGE ANIMAL RESCUE WORKSHOP

STORY GLENN WILSON



PHOTO: GLENN WILSON



PHOTO: MARG ANDERSON

Far left: Leading Firefighter Clayton Derrick and Leading Firefighter Robert Jones from Geelong City brigade discuss the CFA Rescue Unit with Dr Rebecca Gimenez and the course attendees

Left: 32-year-old pony Kiesha, who has been trained to lie down by owner Fred Gillett, is prepared for a recumbent move

Large animal rescue (LAR) is not a field for the faint-hearted. A horse or cow can be a dangerous animal when you're up close, especially if the animal is stressed, trapped or in pain.

Lara brigade's Barry Knight knows this all too well, having attended several LARs over the years. In late October near Geelong, Barry joined more than 40 people from several CFA brigades, State Emergency Service (SES) units, and a few horse owners to receive expert LAR training.

Dr Rebecca Gimenez, from the US, who's been instructing and developing technical and practical expertise in this field for almost 20 years, kept the class entertained, enthralled and challenged.

By using photographs and videos gathered from all over the world, Rebecca provided interesting and challenging real-life LAR scenarios for participants to practise their teamwork and problem-solving skills.

It was also shown that by simply adapting common items of equipment we all have access to, we can safely rescue large animals. Some of Rebecca's key messages were:

- keep the sirens off and approach the animal quietly and calmly
- the owner often has an emotional attachment and needs to be a part of the rescue team but not get in the way
- get a vet on site and give them a helmet to wear
- stay well back during the rescue and after the animal has been rescued because people can get seriously injured by violent and unpredictable thrashing of the animal.
- have secondary containment ready.

It's amazing what a 65mm flat hose, threaded on to an animal correctly, can achieve as a rescue device.

All participants received a copy of *Equine Emergency Rescue – a Guide to Large Animal Rescue*. The book is available from equineer.com, as is information about LAR training courses. ■

EDUCATION BUSES ON THE ROAD

STORY SHEONA URQUHART

While the holiday season was in full swing, Chief Officer Euan Ferguson made the point that often people from cities and suburban areas take a holiday and camp in parts of regional Victoria that are prone to bushfires.

“Because these areas and conditions are unfamiliar to visitors they may not be aware of the risk, meaning they are unprepared for the threat of fire,” he said.

To help combat this, CFA’s education buses – which are normally used to visit schools – took fire safety messages to tourist hotspots across the state, popping up at visitor information centres, truck stops, outdoor malls and car parks at Lorne, Echuca, Phillip Island, Daylesford, Little River, Bendigo, Mallacoota, Healesville and Lakes Entrance.

Difficult to miss, the buses act as a ‘one-stop shop’ where people can chat to trained presenters, actively use the CFA website and FireReady app on computers and iPads, learn about Fire Danger Rating signs and find out what to do on high risk or Total Fire Ban days.

Driver and presenter Robert ‘Toddy’ Small was blown away by the response. “People have been drawn to the bus and have been downloading the FireReady app to their phones while inside it,” he said.

“It’s amazing how much people are really keen to learn about the risks of the area they’re in.”

In January, the buses also toured townships in Gippsland affected by bushfire (including Maffra, Cowwarr, Heyfield and Glenmaggie) where they were used as community meeting points and a source of information. During this 10-day deployment, the bus driver/presenters engaged with more than 6,500 community members at 33 community information meetings and drop-in sessions. ■



PHOTO: NICOLE COOPER-MANNING

WORKING WITH FIRE-CURIOUS KIDS

STORY CHRIS BARBER

Most firefighters eventually come across a situation where a young person has been involved in starting a fire in the home, backyard or a public place.

Sometimes the fire results in just a burnt fence, but at other times the results can be devastating. Often the child’s parents will be concerned by their child’s fascination with fire, but don’t know what to do.

It’s important for CFA firefighters to know about the Juvenile Fire Awareness and Intervention Program (JFAIP) and how to refer people to it. JFAIP is a statewide program run by CFA and the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. It aims to prevent loss of life, injury and property damage caused by inappropriate fire lighting by young people aged between 6 and 17 years old. The program

is delivered by carefully-selected and specially-trained firefighters who work closely with the young person and their family, and the approach can vary depending on the maturity of the young person and the nature of the fire lighting.

It’s important that parents are reassured and given some strategies to minimise risk until the program can be started. This can include keeping matches where the young person can’t see or find them and checking that they have a working smoke alarm. You can give the parents a JFAIP brochure which is available from your region headquarters. This provides them with more information about the program and the central JFAIP contact number 1300 309 988.

If you want to know more about the program, contact your region JFAIP coordinator. ■



LEADING THROUGH LANDSCAPING STORY ANTON MILNE

As part of CFA's summer fire safety campaign, six brigades around Victoria set an example for their communities by landscaping their stations to reduce the impact of bushfire.

Glenlyon, Doreen, Macclesfield, Warring, Hamilton and Drouin West looked at the types of plants used and the design of the garden and, despite a busy fire season, the gardens are on track to be completed this April.

The gardens are a great way to get the whole community together, with brigades teaming up with other local organisations to make these gardens come to life.

"These gardens are a great way of demonstrating that landscaping for bushfire is an extremely important idea for people living in areas at risk," said CFA's Acting Vegetation Management Team Leader Owen Gooding. "The advice is coming from a trusted source within the community – these brigades – which means people can feel reassured about the advice they are receiving."

"Our community lives in a very rural area and always wants to know how to landscape their properties to make them safer," said Macclesfield brigade Captain Sharon Merritt. "The best part about these gardens is that they allow us to show people, rather than describe, ways they can make their properties safer. In turn, that provides us with all sorts of opportunities to engage with them on a range of fire safety issues," she added. ■

If your brigade is interested in building a fire-smart garden, contact Owen Gooding (o.gooding@cfa.vic.gov.au) or read about landscaping for bushfire at cfa.vic.gov.au.



PHOTO: SHARON MERRITT

COMMUNITY FIREGUARD TURNS 20 STORY ANGELA COOK

CFA's Community Fireguard (CFG) program began in the Dandenong Ranges in 1993 with 50 groups. Twenty years later there are well over 1,300 active groups with more than 10,000 members.

CFG aims to establish self-reliant neighbourhood groups in high-risk areas, empowering residents to take responsibility for their own fire safety. Groups of local residents build their skills

and knowledge of fire survival through help from a CFA facilitator. There are six core meetings covering property safety and personal and psychological preparation, plus an ongoing maintenance program at least every second year.

Both independent and CFA-led research has consistently shown the benefits of CFG. Evaluations conducted after the 2009 fires by RMIT University, University of Melbourne and CFA found that active CFG participants were more likely to reduce their losses and have better emotional recovery following a bushfire.

Captain David Webb Ware of Glenburn brigade is enthusiastic about the program.

"After the 2009 fires, it became abundantly clear that we needed to work more in community safety," he said. "I was so impressed by how effective Community Fireguard and the FireReady Victoria programs had been. People who participated were significantly better prepared and that made the community so much more resilient. Most of the people who were part of CFG also seemed to recover quickly.

"I also believe that property loss was minimised because people had some training and preparation."

A DVD, *CFA Community Fireguard Program*, which showcases the benefits of the program, can be viewed on Youtube. ■

A 20th anniversary celebration is being held on 20 April from 12pm to 4pm at Kalorama Recreation Reserve, Kalorama. If you'd like to attend or find out more, call the CFG line on 0429 423 692.

Above: The finished garden at Macclesfield Fire Station

Left: Facilitator Lisa Keedle helps residents take responsibility for their own fire safety



PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

PHOTO: JEREMY MAIDMENT



GREAT EFFORT ON CFA SUNDAY



A very successful CFA Sunday was held on 25 November 2012 with the support of 286 brigades across Victoria. It was great to see the different ways brigades engaged with their communities, given that not all communities are the same or want or need to know the same fire safety information. This was our second CFA Sunday and brigades really took ownership of their event by making it work for their brigade and their community. It was not just about opening their doors and running their hoses.

From the range of activities offered – for example, fire demonstrations, Junior displays, fire safety workshops, colouring-in competitions and bouncing castles – it was obvious that brigades put a lot of thought and preparation into a fun day. Victorians will have benefited greatly from members' knowledge and commitment to CFA. Congratulations and well done to all the brigades that took part. ■

To see more images go to news.cfa.vic.gov.au/cfasunday

Above right: Newry brigade's truck was a hit with the kids

Above left: Children loved using hoses at Hampton Park, as they did around the state

PHOTO: JEREMY MAIDMENT



PHOTO: TROUDE BAINMANES



Far left: Fascinated by a display at Noble Park brigade

Above: Mitchell, Zack and Brock have fun with Coimadai brigade

Left: Burn table demonstration by Wesburn-Millgrove brigade members

PHOTO: TREVOR MARTIN

THROUGH THE AGES Bayswater

COMPILED BY KEITH PAKENHAM



FACES OF CFA

BRENDAN O'NEILL WARRNAMBOOL BRIGADE, DISTRICT 5

How long have you been with this brigade?

About 13 years. I started with CFA in 1981 when I joined Sheans Creek brigade. Our family farm was down the road from CFA and I rode my bike to the shed for the radio check on Sunday mornings before I got my car licence. I then moved to Berwick, Pakenham and Echuca brigades before joining Warrnambool.

Why did you join CFA?

I grew up on a farm and, like most farmers in the district, my father was in CFA. If the farmers and their families weren't in the brigade, there was no firefighting capacity in the area.

When I was younger, the excitement of fire calls drew me to the brigade, but what's kept me involved are the different people I've met and knowing I'm helping people in need. I've met a wide variety of people with a common goal and interest. It doesn't matter if you work on a farm or in an office.

What was the first incident you attended?

Officially, it was a haystack fire caused by welding on an adjoining property. Unofficially, I attended many fires with my father who was a deputy group officer with Euroa Group. At one fire I remember, we confirmed the smoke sighting. We drove straight to the fire, my father dropped me off at the gate and I directed the trucks to the fire as they arrived.

Which incident has had the greatest impact on you?

One Easter eve there was a house fire in Warrnambool. The house was all but destroyed as were the kids' Easter eggs. I told my children about this when they woke up the next morning and they decided to give their Easter eggs to the children who lost theirs in the fire.

What have you done around your home to prevent fires?

I clean spouting, store firewood away from the house, and have installed a fire blanket and extinguisher. I ensure the screen is over the open fire in the winter and I don't use frayed electrical leads.

What do you do when you're not firefighting?

I'm a technical manager with Fonterra, which involves some international travel to interesting destinations in Asia.



At home I enjoy building things from wood – mainly furniture. I recently retired from playing hockey but will still have an association with the club. Our youngest son is involved in sport so we travel around to watch the games he plays in.

After a long stint of firefighting, what meal do you crave?

Lasagne made by my lovely wife or corned beef with mash and vegetables.

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

Pink Floyd is my favourite band and I've seen the Roger Waters Dark Side of the Moon and The Wall concerts in Melbourne. Several of us in the brigade sometimes get together to listen to music. ■

Interview by **Julie Owens**



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Cover: Staging area at Heyfield. Photo by Keith Pakenham