

Brigade

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**Preparing
for the
tourism
season**



**Aviation
roles for
volunteers**



**New training
for volunteer
leaders**

Brigade magazine is published by CFA Communications & Stakeholder Relations, PO Box 701, Mt Waverley Vic

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Printer: IVE Group

Articles reflect the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of CFA.

The editor reserves the right to edit articles.

You can update your address or email details, or cancel Brigade magazine, by clicking on 'manage my profile' on the home page of members.cfa.vic.gov.au or by calling 1800 628 844.

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Useful resources

Brigade cfa.vic.gov.au/brigademag

 news.cfa.vic.gov.au

 facebook.com/cfachiefofficer

 twitter.com/cfa_updates

CFA intranet:
members.cfa.vic.gov.au

Free CFA images for download:
digitallibrary.cfa.vic.gov.au

Community engagement material:
cfa.vic.gov.au/cecontentportal

CFA templates for download:
cfa.vic.gov.au/templatetoolkit



COVER PHOTO: VOLUNTEERS FROM MT MARTHA BRIGADE, BY EDDIE SEAH





VFBV | VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

2023 VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey

The survey is now open for all CFA volunteers. Give your feedback by visiting vfbv.com.au or by scanning this QR code





Summer 2023

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



Natalie MacDonald

In early December we launch the next phase of improvements to the Volunteer Recruitment Hub. These stemmed from feedback and suggestions for improvement from applicants, volunteers and staff. Since its introduction, over 9,000 people have applied to join CFA through the Hub. And the 'Give us a hand' campaign generated a lot of interest.

The changes we are introducing now allow brigades to invite a person to register. This feature will be particularly helpful for brigade members who have previously spoken to, or met, with someone who wishes to join. We've also made other improvements including to access levels for brigades, the timing and distribution of system-generated reminder emails, and the navigation and menu structure.

We are pleased to see the start of the rollout of our Ultra Heavy Tankers which will provide additional capacity to our fleet, particularly in responding to grass and scrub fires in our rural areas and on the urban fringe. This is in addition to the Heavy Tankers which are being delivered to many of our brigades.

It was great to have more than 30 CFA volunteers and staff attend the annual AFAC conference in late August. This conference brings together people from across the Australasian emergency services environment. A number of our members gave presentations on a range of subjects including an update on the new Fire Medical Response program, household bushfire preparedness, fire suppression innovation, disaster resilience in education and supporting women volunteers. Well done to everyone for showcasing the tremendous work being done across the organisation.

We now have an organisation-wide events calendar on Members Online that can be used to promote major CFA events, activities and key meetings. The calendar can be used by brigades to highlight dinners and award nights. To register an event go to members.cfa.vic.gov.au/events/register-your-event. This is in addition to our 'What's On' calendar on our website, which can be used to promote community safety meetings, bushfire planning workshops, recruitment activities and brigade open days.

Our *First Nations Australians Engagement Guidelines* are now available on Members Online. This important guide will help our members to better engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and improve our knowledge and understanding. I encourage everyone to read this document.

Following the Gippsland fires in October, it's clear we are going to have a more challenging fire season than the past few years. It's important to remember that heightened fire activity can lead to greater anxiety or other wellbeing issues. For support and information call the Member Support Line on 1800 959 232. Also, our free and anonymous app, CFA thrive, will help you understand where you sit on the mental health continuum.

We thank you all for your ongoing commitment to serving and protecting Victorians.

CHIEF OFFICER



Jason Heffernan

We are well and truly already seeing a return to a traditional summer bushfire season. In early October, Victoria recorded more than 220 fires over the course of a few days, with significant fires breaking out at Briagolong, Rawson and Loch Sport, and emergency alerts issued across communities in West Gippsland, South Gippsland and East Gippsland. As we know these areas were noted as having above normal bushfire potential for spring.

Our crews worked tirelessly alongside other agencies to fight these fires and protect the affected communities.

Heading from one weather extreme to the other in the space of a week, the fire danger was quickly replaced by floods, with major flooding recorded in a number of catchment areas across the eastern part of the state.

Our members were there to answer the call across the board, with strike teams coming from all over Victoria to assist local crews to fight fires and assist in flood cleanup. Our members are always ready to assist with any emergency, and I thank them for their ongoing work in keeping our Victorian communities safe.

Now is the time to continue to prepare our communities for the summer season, ensuring we are empowering them in their fire safety knowledge. It is vital that our communities understand the importance of planning for the fire season, preparing their properties and understanding their fire risk. Each of us plays a role in getting the message across to Victorians.

The introduction of the Fire Danger Periods is a great reminder to your communities to start their summer preparations now, ensuring their properties are ready.

We are in the process of reviewing our Standard Operating Procedures and aligning them with our new policy framework. Members are invited to provide feedback through the new CFA bulletin board – **policies.cfa.vic.gov.au**. It's important to note that there will be no changes without notification to all members.

I want to take this opportunity to remind you to look after yourselves. Ensure you are taking time for you and your family, take a moment to take stock of your wellbeing and note any changes; make sure to manage your fatigue. Rest and take breaks when necessary.

Above all – look out for each other. We know all too well the impacts that a busy season can have, so ensure you are looking out for your peers and friends and check in with one another.

Stay safe.

DCO NORTH WEST REGION



Gavin Thompson

Last summer was both challenging and rewarding for North West Region. The most significant challenge for our members and the wider community were the 2022 Victorian floods. CFA rose to the occasion with courage and dedication and our members worked diligently to ensure the safety of those in need, often while being personally impacted.

I continue to be amazed by the way our people step up in incredible ways to support the response effort, and I am grateful for your selflessness and unwavering commitment to our communities. I am proud to be a part of an emergency service with such dedicated, adaptable and compassionate members.

I would like to highlight the challenge some of our farming communities face with having minimal respite between harvesting late last year into early this year, followed quickly by cropping and now harvesting again. I strongly encourage all members to monitor for fatigue-related risks to health and safety; rest where you can and always put the safety of yourself and others first.

The 2023-24 fire season is fast upon us and will be vastly different to last year as the weather has shifted from La Niña to El Niño. While conditions will be warmer and drier than previous years, there are still high levels of moisture across state due to the above average rainfall over the past three years. The high risk of fire is predicted to be experienced predominately in the Mallee and parts of Gippsland. The first Total Fire Ban for the season was in the Mallee on Monday 2 October 2023.

Some great prevention work has been undertaken across North West Region leading up to the fire season. This included more than 100 direct and indirect community engagement activities as well as the development of fuel reduction plans and delivery against this plan. Prevention work is as critical as readiness and response activities in keeping our communities safe from fire. If you are interested in helping with preventative work, I encourage you to reach out to your catchment team.

For your safety and the safety of others, I encourage all members to undertake skills maintenance activities including the Entrapment Drill and Tree Hazard Awareness. I would also encourage brigades to revisit the Chief Officer's Standing Order and the series of standard operating procedures for driving and operating CFA and private vehicles. As a past driving instructor, I encourage all drivers to familiarise themselves with their vehicles and find some time to do some refresher drives. Stay safe and look out for one another.

GROUP OFFICER, D16



Rod McErvale

I am now in my fourth year as Group Officer of Beaufort Group, which comprises eight brigades halfway between Ballarat and Ararat. I joined Raglan Fire Brigade as soon as I turned 16 and have remained a Raglan member despite living in three brigade areas across 35 years.

When I joined CFA, people learned to be firefighters through lived experience and being shown by the leaders at the time. I grew up farming in both the Beaufort and Pyrenees groups among a great strength of people who just knew they had to get the job done. Many senior volunteers had a strong understanding of fire and, more importantly, how the fire behaved in their patch – something you can't learn from a textbook.

During my time at CFA the greatest improvement I've seen is in the quality of the equipment. When I joined, a few of the Austins were still in service. Of course, with this new equipment came the improvement in firefighter safety and training.

I believe the strength of all of District 16's groups and brigades is in part thanks to the exceptional support we get from the staff at our headquarters, including our BASOs, district admin and our commanders, some of whom have lived in Ararat for almost as long as me.

Last year our group experienced one of its worst floods in years and I was astonished to see how Skipton Fire Brigade, the local SES and Corangamite Shire Council worked together so quickly to support the affected residents in Skipton.

In Beaufort Group we're lucky to have a Forest Fire Management Victoria depot, and because most of them live locally there's a strong working bond between our two agencies. We meet yearly for a pre-summer breakfast and help them with some of their fuel reduction burns when we can.

We are one of very few groups that can boast that every brigade has a brigade-owned tanker in their station. Some of these trucks are even newer than the CFA appliances that sit beside them.

In the past four years there has been a huge increase in population in several of the townships in my group, but encouraging these new residents to become CFA members or join any local volunteer organisation has been challenging. This is starting to affect some brigades' ability to turn out, especially during the day. Another issue we must address is how we will fill our management roles in brigades and groups in a decade or so. Succession planning will be a challenge.

But looking at CFA as a whole, I feel proud that I'm a member and am part of what volunteerism represents in this country.

Lithium-ion battery safety

Just before 4am in late March 2023, Kerri and David Saunderson were woken by the sound of an explosion at their Kilsyth home. They saw an “orange glow” through their bathroom window, followed by a series of popping noises.

Kerri recalled making the Triple Zero (000) call and racing out of the property to safety.

When firefighters arrived and brought the fire under control, it became clear the fire had been caused by an e-scooter lithium-ion battery that had exploded on the back deck.

Kerri said the scooter was being charged overnight when it caught alight.

“The battery exploded with such force and extreme heat that it blew out the back bedroom and bathroom windows,” Kerri said. “The bedroom, bathroom, toilet and laundry areas were gutted, and the rest of the house was completely destroyed.”

Ten CFA units responded with support from FRV crews. She said brigades arrived on scene quickly, but the fire was so intense it had already spread throughout the house.

CFA called the incident under control just after 4.20am and the fire was completely extinguished and declared safe at 7.20am.

“Firefighters were amazing during the fire response and we also appreciated the compassion they showed to us that night,” Kerri said. “I urge anyone with an e-scooter or lithium-ion battery-powered product to use it carefully and heed warnings from fire services.

“It all happened so fast and was so intense – we were lucky to escape. It could’ve been much worse.”

When speaking with members of your community about these risks, pass on these key safety tips:

- Purchase products from reputable suppliers.
- Only use chargers and cords that are supplied with the device.
- Don’t modify or tamper with the batteries and the appliances they power.
- Don’t leave batteries charging in direct sunlight or for longer than they need to.
- Only charge batteries on non-combustible surfaces in a room where a smoke alarm is present.
- Don’t use batteries or devices that show signs of swelling, bulging, leaking or overheating.
- Don’t charge items close to a door, which would block your exit if the item did catch fire.

Here’s what people should do if a lithium-ion battery product catches fire:

- Stop using the product if you notice overheating, bulging, leaking or unusual sounds.
- Leave the area and call Triple Zero (000) immediately, even if you no longer see flames or smoke.
- It’s not safe to attempt to put the fire out yourself because batteries involved in fire can release toxic gases and generate multiple explosions. Ensure firefighters attend to make the area safe.
- Never throw lithium-ion batteries in your regular waste or recycling collection bins. Many battery-related fires start in household bins, garbage trucks and waste facilities.



WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT LITHIUM-ION BATTERIES

What are lithium-ion batteries?

Lithium-ion batteries are rechargeable batteries often found in modern devices that can be plugged into a charger and are not designed to be removed by the consumer.

What’s the difference between lithium-ion batteries and lithium batteries?

Lithium-ion batteries are rechargeable, while lithium batteries are single-use only.

What are the fire risks?

We know that the main reason lithium-ion batteries catch fire is because of damage which causes a process called thermal runaway, also known as thermal explosions. Thermal runaway is when a lithium-ion battery enters an uncontrollable, self-heating state and can present as violent sparks and self-sustaining jet-like flames.

How do I know if my device or battery is damaged?

Look for signs of bulging, leaking, overheating, strong odours, unusual noises or signs of mechanical damage such as cracking, dents or punctures.

Never touch a swollen or ruptured device or battery with bare hands as the heat or chemicals can cause injuries.

STORY MITCH GASTIN

Safety Compliance Project update



Between 2015 and 2018 extensive research and development was conducted to ensure CFA sourced the most appropriate equipment for our Low Voltage Fuse Removal (LVFR) and Safe Work at Heights (SWH) tasks. Following this we developed comprehensive training packages. Prototype static and mobile training props were conceived and built so training could be delivered to brigades across the state.

As the scope of LVFR and SWH became clear, a dedicated team was set up to combine and progress them. The Safety Compliance Project was formed in 2019 to manage the rollout of training delivery, issuing of new equipment, introduction of new training props and vehicle modifications to brigades.

The Training, Infrastructure Services and Fleet and Equipment teams and ACFOs in each district identify their priority brigades that need training, and this information is passed onto the Safety Compliance Project team and district training coordinators.

Low voltage fuse removal

When attending structure fires, firefighters need to disconnect the flow of electricity to the building before any firefighting operations are undertaken to mitigate the risk of electrical shock to firefighters and bystanders. Follow SOP 9.14.

Energy Safe Victoria (ESV) regulates activities relating to electrical safety. CFA must comply with the Electricity Safety Act, Victorian Service and Installation Rules and published technical standards. To abide by these regulations and reduce the risks associated with electricity, the Safety Compliance Project team supports brigades with comprehensive training and the appropriate kits to perform the task safely.

So far, 613 brigades have been identified by districts based on their risk and response profiles for LVFR, of which 501 have completed the training and have kits. It's expected that the remaining 112 brigades will complete training by June 2025.

CFA has both mobile and fixed props at training grounds to conduct this training. The mobile props (pictured right) are trailer-based so that training can be conducted at locations that suit volunteers. An additional 10 trailers are currently going through the tender process and should be completed

by May 2024 to give brigades greater access to skills maintenance training.

Safe Work at Heights

Recent changes to OH&S regulations in 2017 require CFA to have safety systems in place to manage falls from any height, and members must follow SOP 9.41. CFA currently uses specialist rope rescue teams for complex incidents.

For brigades responding to common operational incidents involving residential homes and small commercial buildings, CFA introduced Safe Work at Heights training and equipment to reduce the risks associated with working at heights.

Special props (such as the one pictured above) are being constructed or updated at Victorian Emergency Management Training Centres, with Central Highlands and Sunraysia due to be operational shortly.

CFA has trained 113 brigades and kits have been dispatched after being identified by districts based on their risk and response profiles, and a further 163 brigades will complete the training by June 2025.

Alternative power and fire safety

This project also includes a limited scope in alternative power. Since the project began, alternative power technology has been evolving quickly. This means

CFA firefighters are responding to more emergencies where these technologies are involved. The ongoing research, monitoring and understanding of these technologies is continuing so that the associated risks and development of actions that need to be taken can be communicated to our members.

Some common types of technologies currently being investigated are:

- battery energy storage systems (BESS) for residential, community, industrial and grid supply installations
- lithium-ion batteries for use in a range of devices
- electric vehicles
- wind power to generate electricity
- solar (photovoltaic)
- geothermal
- hydroelectric
- hydrogen and fuel cells.

CFA has created several videos to improve volunteers' knowledge of various models of electric vehicles – search for 'electric vehicles' on Members Online. You can also search for 'alternative power' on Members Online.

STORY PAT HUNTER



All-Indigenous crew becomes Bunjil brigade

A newly-formed, all-Indigenous CFA brigade has chosen Bunjil (the eagle) as its name. Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust station became a CFA brigade in its own right following representation from dedicated community members who have protected their land for two decades.

The members are CFA's only all-Indigenous crew and have proudly and successfully responded to incidents within the Trust land, but as a satellite station of nearby Toorloo Fire Brigade. CFA Chief Officer Jason Heffernan approved the establishment of an official brigade on the Trust land.

Bunjil Fire Brigade member Charmaine Sellings, who was the driving force behind the brigade's establishment, said they engaged with local Elders to vote on an Indigenous name for the new brigade.

"The Elders were given three options and Bunjil was chosen," Charmaine said. "Bunjil 'the eagle' was the fitting choice as we have sea eagles in the area and the local football team has an eagle on their guernsey."

The original crew is thrilled it will be recognised as an independent brigade.

"It's fantastic and we're so pleased about this decision because it means that we will lead and manage decisions about our brigade on our own country, which is something we have wanted to do for many years," Charmaine said.



"We have one road in and one road out with more than 3,000 hectares of bushland, so it's very important to protect our community and to also help other brigades when required.

"Our goal now is to expand the brigade further with new recruits so they can lead us into the future."

The site of the satellite station at Toorloo, which has become Bunjil Fire Station, will receive infrastructure improvements over the coming months including the addition of a small meeting room incorporating a kitchen, a turnout room and toilet facilities.

CFA is committed to supporting and collaborating with First Nations people and ensuring that their stories and cultural traditions are recognised.

STORY AMY SCHILDBERGER

New Phillip Island Fire Station

The new and improved Phillip Island Fire Station is open. The \$3.275 million facility replaced the former station built in 1962, which no longer met the needs of the growing brigade.

The brigade's 59 members will enjoy new state-of-the-art facilities including one large engine bay to house the brigade's four vehicles, a purpose-built meeting room with training resources, modern kitchen and two offices.

Phillip Island Captain Lino Drazzi said the new station was "top notch".

"We're certainly in a location now that is more accessible, especially in the busier times, to get to different parts of the island," Lino said.

"Turn out times should be quicker and we're closer to the newer estates."

Lino, who has been with the brigade for 22 years and captain since July this year, said Phillip Island brigade had outgrown the old station thanks to a booming membership.

"Now we don't even need to leave the premises for training, which can be done on site," he said.

The original Phillip Island station was in the main street and opened in 1937 before the brigade moved in 1962.

The new station was jointly funded by the 2019-20 Emergency Services Local Infrastructure Program and the brigade.

STORY MARNIE REID



UPDATE ON MAJOR PROJECTS

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

Next generation wildfire PPC

During the first quarter, the project team received 8,300 orders and began to roll out the clothing to 462 operational volunteers in 64 brigades. This rollout continues.



Connected Brigades

In the past few months, we connected 109 of the remaining 115 stations to the internet and all the connections have been tested.

In total, 1,162 brigades have been connected since the start of the project.

Currently, we are assessing the best way to connect the remaining six sites, which are all in remote locations.



Wildfire Respiratory Protection

Members who expressed interest in the trial have been selected and provided trial respiratory protection products. Due to last season having minimal fire activity, the Chief Officer approved the extension of the trial to include this summer season.

This will allow members to better evaluate the products.

Gender Equality Action Plan – Implementation Plan

The team has been delivering the Gender Impact Assessment training. We have also collaborated with several projects with the aim to present data that shows the progress being made in providing a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment for women and people of diverse genders at CFA.

We will now prepare a report on our progress which will be presented to the Commission in February. We will also deliver information about mentoring and sponsoring women in leadership across CFA, and continue to roll out Gender Impact Assessment training.



Enhancing General Firefighter training

We finalised consultations, collated data and assessed how General Firefighter (GFF) could be improved. Thanks to the GFF recruits and trainers from across the state who contributed to this work.

Membership data and information continue to provide insights to the course development team.

The next steps are to produce an updated design brief of the GFF course and a report outlining recommendations. An updated course will include more video content, development of additional learning tools, GFF assessment improvements, and an update to learning content. The course will not be longer.

Mobile Data Capability

We recently established and completed a proof of concept trial with District 13's Maroondah Group. The recommendations from the evaluation of this trial have been endorsed and the project will continue as business as usual (BAU). Thanks to District 13 members for taking part.

The SOTI MobiControl will be used as CFA's enterprise mobility management tool.

We are continuing activities to ensure all security requirements are met, and continuing ESTA integration planning activities.



AVIATION ROLES FOR VOLUNTEERS

There are seven roles available to volunteers to support aviation response. We talked to four volunteers about their roles.

GRAEME BRIGGS, FIXED-WING BOMBER LOADER

It's not quite as fast paced as a Formula One pit stop, but it comes close. Graeme Briggs is one of CFA's fixed-wing bomber loaders. His job is to go out onto the tarmac while the plane is still running and load it with either water, foam or retardant.

Graeme's been doing the role for 15 years and said he still gets a kick out of it.

An average day at the airbase during a fire is from 8am to 10pm filling about 10 planes an hour.

"The biggest day was during the 2019-20 Gippsland fires where we did a total of 92 loads," Graeme said.

"It can be fairly strenuous making sure everything is working correctly to make loading more efficient. You can be in a hot and noisy environment for a lot of the day.

"It's a simple skill, but it's a disciplined skill that you have to have to work within the boundary. Absolutely anyone who is an operational CFA member can do this role.

"The aircraft are based at Hamilton, Stawell, Bairnsdale – numerous places across the state depending on where they land.

"I have always had a little bit of interest in aircraft. It certainly gets into your blood and under your skin when you start working in the industry."

One of the perks of the job is to occasionally go up in a plane, but when asked if he could land a plane if directed Graeme said, "no – it's very complicated".

Graeme started working in the State Aviation Unit in the State Control Centre in 2007.

Based in Balnarring with a mechanical background, Graeme has made it a family affair, with his wife and son also having had training as fixed wing bomber loaders.

"When my wife and I go traveling, we ask one another what type of aircraft that is and where it might be going."

STORY BRIGID ENNIS



MICK OTT, AIR ATTACK SUPERVISOR

Mick, a Beaconsfield Fire Brigade firefighter, began his role as an air attack supervisor in the 2022-23 fire season after being an air observer for six years.

"I've been a CFA member for almost 35 years and have gained a lot of experience," Mick said. "I've always been interested in aviation and I put my hand up when the opportunity to be an air observer came up. I then stepped up to the air attack role as it's good to learn new skills and put my experience to good use."

As an air attack supervisor (AAS) Mick coordinates the firebombing aircraft from a fixed wing aircraft or helicopter.

"The role of the AAS is to communicate with the incident controller to ensure the firebombing aircraft are working to their plan while maintaining the safety of the aircraft and crews on the ground.

"There are a lot of safety considerations while coordinating aircraft in the air. We need to make sure the aircraft work in a way to avoid risk of a collision. My role is like an airborne air traffic controller and strike team leader rolled into one."

This sounds like a very stressful job, but Mick takes it in his stride. "It's mentally and physically demanding, but that's what I enjoy about it. I might feel nervous in the beginning – there are a lot of people relying on me – but once I'm doing the job I just get on with it."

Mick normally operates out of Moorabbin Airport and during the fire season AASs are on a four-day roster.

"When I'm rostered on, I'm on standby at the airport waiting for a pre-determined dispatch (PDD) call. We cover Districts 8, 13 and 14 but can also be dispatched across the state. Thanks to PDD we can be above a fire quickly. When a brigade is paged to a fire, we get paged at the same time and we're airborne in 10 minutes.

"This role has given me a new focus in CFA. It came at a really good time for me after being on the ground for 35 years."

STORY DUNCAN RUSSELL



PATRICK HAYES, AIR OBSERVER

Patrick Hayes has an impressive CFA resume having volunteered for more than 28 years with three brigades, yet his most fulfilling role is his most recent one as an air observer.

Playing a pivotal role in the air for the ground crews, Patrick gets great satisfaction from knowing he's helping to achieve a favourable outcome for the community by gathering real-time information from the sky.

For the past six years, Patrick has flown in fixed-wing aircraft for reconnaissance and fire detection, though more recently has been stationed with the Airborne Information Gathering (AIG) helicopter, a state resource.

"The AIG 'Firebird 300' helicopters are used for airborne information gathering, and it's our job to get that data to the right people, especially in the early stages of a fire," Patrick said.

"When there's a fire, we fly over it and take photos and other intelligence that we're then able to pass onto the incident control centres (ICC) to assist the incident management teams (IMT) and ground crews with their tactics and strategies for suppressing that fire.

"Our sophisticated camera-mapping software allows us to livestream footage back to them to assist with their decision-making.

"The state-of-the-art equipment allows us to map fire perimeters and identify hot spots through an infrared camera system which we can then translate back into the heatmap software that multiple users on the ground and ICCs can use to interpret and action."

Patrick said crew members are proactive in the air, with one crew member controlling the camera systems in the aircraft, while the other is responsible for mapping and transmitting the data back to the ICCs and ICs.

"We can communicate directly with the firefighters on the ground, so if we do see a certain area of the fire that's going to potentially pose a problem to life, property or their safety, we can inform them," Patrick said.

"Through the imagery gained from our camera system we can identify heat sources and advise ICs that their strike team could be at risk of an ember attack or that there are spot fires developing in certain areas."

The invaluable skills that Patrick has developed in information and intelligence gathering, aviation mapping and fire detection have not only strengthened his CFA experience, but also his full-time work as a sergeant for Victoria Police.

STORY LUCY BISHOP



SIMON WILSON, AIRBASE MANAGER

Simon Wilson has always loved aviation. "Who doesn't?" he said. He has been one of the airbase managers at Hamilton Airport for three seasons.

Simon has been a CFA member for 53 years. The now retired farmer, who owned a property near Peshurst, joined at aged 16.

"Most farmers join CFA when young," Simon said. "It's self-preservation more than anything else. If you're helping to put a fire out on a neighbour's farm, you hope they help you when your farm is in danger."

Simon is no stranger to planes; his father was a private pilot. Simon was also an air observer for 30 years before retiring and becoming an airbase manager. As airbase manager, Simon calls himself a "jack of all trades".

"It's a weird job. You can spend a lot of days doing nothing, but the best days are when you're doing nothing because it means there are no fires," he said.

But during a fire it's a different story. The airport has two water bombers and a third plane with an air attack supervisor who directs the bombers over the fires.

Simon's job is to look after the airbase including managing loading planes with retardant and foam until the fire is out, health and safety, ordering meals and petrol and more retardant. And the pilots must report in with him every 30 minutes to pass on instructions.

When asked about the hardest part of the role he said "there isn't one" before adding, "maybe giving up a good percentage of your summers to help. But that's true for most volunteers."

Simon said the airbase was always looking for volunteers, both young and old.

"People come along that love aviation but sometimes they don't last long when they realise they won't be doing Top Gun impersonations," he said. "But aviation is a very important link in an important chain."

STORY MARNIE REID

Improving the training for operational leaders

CFA crew leaders, strike team leaders and sector commanders are an integral part of the delivery of firefighting services across Victoria. Every day, these volunteers carry out significant roles in protecting Victorians from the threat of bush and urban fires.

As a result of funding from the Victorian Government's Capability Measures Program, a project was created to develop programs and courses to enhance the skills and capabilities of volunteers performing these critical roles. The theme of the project is to transition people from being competent to proficient.

To achieve this, the project team needed to:

- update the crew leader, strike team leader and sector commander skills acquisition courses
- offer professional development opportunities to crew leaders
- develop an Operational Doctrine in Practice course
- expand access to immersive learning opportunities.

"The role of our fireground leaders is pivotal for success," Operational Doctrine and Training DCO Rohan Luke said. "We need to prepare our crew leaders, strike team leaders and sector commanders to make confident, well thought out decisions in very dynamic environments.

"Our aim is to provide the best quality training that allows our leaders to explore the challenges that go with being a fireground leader in a safe environment."

Skills acquisition courses

The Operational Doctrine and Training (ODT) team, with the support of subject matter experts (SMEs) including VFBV, have been working extensively to redevelop the skills acquisition courses for crew leaders, strike team leaders and sector commanders. These courses were well overdue for improvement to allow for greater flexibility of learning, provide up-to-date information and to support evidence-based practice.

While working through the sector commander course development, 17 volunteers from across the state accompanied by VFBV representatives, ODT staff and instructors, completed the equivalent course run by NSW Rural Fire Service (see photo, below). This not only enabled more volunteers to be eligible to work as a sector commander during the upcoming fire season, but also promoted interagency collaboration and allowed CFA members to learn how other agencies deliver courses for volunteer leaders.

Carrum Downs Captain Terrence Larkin, who took part in the training, saw the potential benefits.

"As an endorsed strike team leader and deputy group officer in South East Group, it's important for me to continue to develop operationally and as a leader," Terrence said. "Participating in the training was a great opportunity to try something different for CFA and to see whether it was something that could be adapted to our needs."





The ODT team, SMEs and VFBV are working through the course content and putting it into context to meet CFA's needs. This is an exciting opportunity to allow more members to operate at the sector commander level and strengthen the leadership base across the organisation.

Crew leader professional development

Another key aspect of this project is to provide professional development for those currently operating as crew leaders. Previously, there was very limited access to professional development for volunteers in leadership positions. Research was carried out to establish how best to provide this professional development across the state.

One pathway investigated was a multi-day course held at the Victorian Emergency Management Institute at Mount Macedon in conjunction with the Australian Institute of Police Management over two weekends in August 2023 (see photo, above). The course titled 'CFA - leading in action' covered the following key themes:

- Leadership development for crew leaders, designed to equip individuals with the essential skills and knowledge needed to excel as effective leaders.
- Focus on developing operational leadership competencies.
- Empowering participants to demonstrate command and control for frontline leadership.

Bridgewater Fire Brigade 1st Lieutenant Steve Fawcett said the course gave him more confidence in decision-making and many other areas of leadership.

"I think it's important to take up training opportunities like this

when they arise, because it makes CFA a stronger organisation. I definitely recommend this course to all new or existing leaders," Steve said.

Following this trial course, the project team set the foundations to develop a professional leadership course for crew leaders that is robust, informative, and leaves the participants in a much stronger position to lead their teams effectively. The key focus of the course is leadership, effective communication and decision-making under pressure. A significant portion of the training will be the practical application of skills. This course is in the development stage and more information will be shared on Members Online when available.

Operational Doctrine in Practice

The Operational Doctrine in Practice course is still in its conception stages. It will be designed to bring together elements of doctrine including size-up, RECEO (rescue, exposures, containment, extinguish, overhaul), dynamic risk assessment and SMEACS (situation, mission, execution, administration and logistics, command and safety). Initially targeted at crew leaders and above, the course will benefit those wanting to further their knowledge of doctrine in the field. The course is sure to lead to many 'light bulb' moments that will make participants stop and think "this all makes sense now".

All new courses will be available in 2024 through your Learning and Development team.

"I encourage you to keep an eye out for these opportunities as they arise," Rohan Luke said.

STORY JESS TAYLOR

PREPARING FOR THE TOURISM SEASON

During summer the population of some small towns can grow to ten times or more their normal size. Here's how four brigades deal with the increased fire risk.

Stories: Duncan Russell, Lerna Avakian and Georgina Hill

BRIGHT FIRE BRIGADE

Nestled in the heart of north-east Victoria, Bright has a huge surge of tourists during the summer months. Its population can increase from about 3,000 to more than 20,000 overnight as visitors pour in.

"Visitors are drawn to the picturesque landscapes and engaging events and festivals that the area has to offer," Bright Fire Brigade Captain Brad Drennan said.

However, the vibrant energy and influx of tourists coexists with summer fire risks.

"Our region faces challenges such as dry weather, dense vegetation and occasionally extreme temperatures. These factors create a potent mix that demands vigilance and preparedness."

To tackle these risks head on, Bright brigade focuses on building strong partnerships with local community groups, Alpine Shire Council, local emergency services agencies and Forest Fire Management Victoria. It also collaborates with Hancock Victoria Plantations to circulate community safety information to the local community and visitors.

"We have a good partnership with the Bright Chamber of Commerce and have a presence at their monthly market in town, 'Make It, Bake It, Grow It,'" Brad said. "This gives us an opportunity to interact with and educate both locals and tourists about summer fire safety, the bushfire risks in the area, what the various community sirens mean, the new Australian Fire Danger Rating System, and the importance of planning and preparing."

"There's only one road in and one road out of Bright, so it's really important that visitors are aware and plan accordingly.

"We also visit the caravan parks over summer to ensure they have the current AFDRS displayed.

"Ensuring the safety of our community, including the tourist population who enjoy our town, is our top priority. Our collaboration with our partners amplifies our efforts, making our town resilient and safe, even in the face of summer fire risks.

"We continue to work tirelessly, hand in hand with the community and emergency services. We stand steadfast to ensure Bright remains not just a beautiful destination, but also a safe holiday destination for all."



YARRAWONGA FIRE BRIGADE

Situated on the Murray River, Yarrawonga normally has a population of about 8,500 but there's been extensive growth in tourism in the past 10 years as people enjoy the climate, boating, fishing, golf and forest walks.

"I reckon the population between here and Cobram goes up to about 20,000 in summer," Yarrawonga Fire Brigade Captain Cade Phillips said. "It gets that busy on campsites it's almost as if people are camping on top of each other."

Before the fire season Cade visits bush areas with Parks Victoria staff to assess fuel loads.

"The river backs onto farmland, so we practise our skills to protect assets," Cade said. "People have to be wary when they are near the riverbanks because of the high fuel loads."

Cade is pleased that most tourists behave responsibly and know the fire risks.

"They are aware of what's happened in the past and they are proactive rather than reactive. But in the summer, we still get four or five turnouts a week to unattended campfires or grass and scrub fires that can spread quickly.

"We're usually pretty quick to respond to an incident, and some campers help by starting to put out the fire. Although most people do the right thing, there are people who light fires in dangerous places and some people drive their four-wheel drives through long grass."

The brigade has 20 operational members, a heavy tanker and a light tanker, and they usually have no problem getting a full crew out to incidents.

This year, the brigade attended the Yarrawonga-Mulwala Agricultural Show at the beginning of October to pass on fire safety messages. As well as taking a truck, the brigade borrowed the district's information trailer which contains CFA's fire safety leaflets.



PHOTO: YARRAWONGA CHRONICLE



LORNE FIRE BRIGADE

Lorne, a popular seaside town on the south-west coast, grows from about 1,300 to more than 15,000 during summer. Lorne Fire Brigade Captain Lee Hollmer and District 7 Commander Wayne Aylmer take a proactive approach to the increased risk and carry out a range of initiatives every year to help ensure everyone stays safe.

“In our busy summer period the town hosts the Pier to Pub swimming race in mid-January and that can add an extra 4,000 to 5,000 visitors on top of the 15,000,” Lee said.

From Boxing Day to the middle of January Lorne brigade receives additional support from volunteer structural firefighters from up to 12 brigades in the south west. These volunteers arrive in the early morning and leave in the evening. They respond to incidents along the coast, but their primary role is to support Lorne brigade during the busy period.

“Every day during this period, we get four or five volunteers and an additional pumper. It’s a massive boost to our brigade and relieves our crews who need to run businesses or work in hospitality.”

District 7 set up the summer crewing initiative after the Wye River fire in 2015 to give local firefighters respite. Initially, career CFA firefighters supported Lorne, and then after Fire Services Reform it switched to support from volunteers.

“Potentially, members could leave CFA if we ask too much of them. This summer crewing initiative supports Lorne brigade and makes it more sustainable,” Wayne said.

“Other volunteers assisting us with the majority of structural incidents allows us to support Lorne SES and neighbouring brigades with rescues and car accidents on the Great Ocean Road,” Lee said. “It also means on Total Fire Ban days we can work with FFMVic to check on campgrounds and illegal campfires in the Otways, and support our group with strike team requirements.

“We regularly drive through caravan parks to make sure there’s enough room for a fire truck and we visit them on days when the Fire Danger Rating is high.

“We also support the PAVS [Property Advice Visit Service] team which sets up in different parts of the town to engage tourists. We talk to real estate businesses and give them fire safety information and we also use social media to pass on safety advice.”

If you’re interested in being part of the Lorne summer crew email d07.coastal@cfa.vic.gov.au.

MALLACOOTA FIRE BRIGADE

Mallacoota is one of Gippsland’s great escapes. A popular small holiday and fishing town in the far eastern corner of Victoria, at the last census it had a population of about 1,100 but come Christmas that number swells to more than 10,000.

After the devastating fires of 2019-20 Mallacoota Fire Brigade is leaving no stone unturned to prepare and ready residents and holidaymakers for the upcoming season.

Throughout November, the fire station was open for anyone to drop in for a chat with brigade captain and local small business owner Tracey Johnston.

“Whenever I’m working from the station, the doors are always open and all community members are welcome to call in, even during the holiday season,” Tracey said.

In early December the region held a fire and emergency preparedness day with local emergency services and the council.

“The brigade has a close working relationship with our counterparts at DEECA and FFMVic as well as the Fuel Management Working Group in Mallacoota. There are quarterly meetings and plenty of information sharing,” Tracey said.

A community Local Incident Management Plan is also available on the East Gippsland Shire website.

“These will be printed and distributed to local households and businesses and the council-run Foreshore Holiday Park will provide relevant information to campers when they check in.”

A pilot program called ‘Vols on Hols’ is also being trialled this summer to get more boots on the ground in far east Gippsland. The population growth combined with Mallacoota’s isolation and increased fire risk over summer makes it the perfect location for the program.

It has been developed mainly for operational responders with General Firefighter/Minimum Skills, Tree Hazard Awareness and Entrapment procedure. Interested members can provide an expression of interest by using this QR code,



Tracey said she welcomed the program in Mallacoota which will bolster the available resources to the brigade.

“We know that visiting CFA members want to help during an emergency and we welcome their skills to assist when they are available. The more hands, the better result all round.”

St Leonards-Indented Head celebrates new station

From the early days as a 'kit' shed, St Leonards-Indented Head Fire Brigade is celebrating its new state-of-the-art station. The \$3.18 million station is a modern, fit-for-purpose facility that replaced the Dudley Parade station which was around 40 years old.

The station has three generously-sized engine bays, a kitchen area adjoining a large multi-purpose room for meetings and training and a dedicated gender-neutral turnout room containing separate change cubicles. There are also toilet and shower facilities.

St Leonards-Indented Head Captain Niki Habibis said the brigade has come a long way since operating as two separate brigades, one of them from the local pub.

"St Leonards brigade was formed in 1943 and had they stored their knapsacks and fire beaters at the local pub," Niki said. "People would call the pub if there was an emergency hoping local volunteer firefighters there could attend the incident.

"Indented Head didn't have a dedicated space to operate from in the 1940s, so it made sense for the two brigades to amalgamate. This happened in 1963."

The kit shed was built by brigade members in about 1964. In 1983 a new two-bay station was built and this was home to St Leonards-Indented Head until it was replaced with the current station.



Niki said the previous station couldn't fit their three firefighting vehicles which meant they had to house one in the rear shed.

"The increased engine bay space allows the brigade to comfortably fit their firefighting vehicles and any new modern vehicles in the future," Niki said. "It's also valuable to see improved features as part of the design such as better equipment storage, hose tower, workshop and large training pad.

"We also have more modern and energy efficient operations including a comprehensive solar panelling system

with Tesla storage battery, rainwater harvesting via multiple tanks and on-site wastewater treatment systems.

"Our 21 members are thoroughly enjoying operating from the new station and it will be a great asset for future growth of the brigade.

"It also means a lot to the community and we look forward to sharing this site with them. Ultimately, this new station is about the people and hopefully a facility like this will attract more people to join our incredible brigade."

STORY AMY SCHILDBERGER

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Early start to the fire season

On Sunday 1 October, Victorians got their first glimpse of what is in store this fire season when evacuation warnings were issued in Gippsland as strong winds fanned several out-of-control fires that threatened homes. Meanwhile, the following day at the opposite end of the state the season's first Total Fire Ban was declared for the Mallee, because of temperatures well over 30°C and a strong northerly wind.

Significant grass and bushfires broke out over that weekend with more than 220 fires reported by the Monday, many the result of reignition of burn-offs.

On Sunday afternoon there were four emergency warnings for fires near Loch Sport, Briagolong, Forge Creek and Rawson, and one home was lost near Briagolong.

By Monday, the Briagolong fire covered 5,600 hectares and was 42km in perimeter. Two separate emergency warnings advising "take shelter now" were issued on Tuesday morning, one covering the area around Briagolong and one for Seacombe and Loch Sport. A third emergency warning telling people to leave immediately was issued for Glenaladale and Fernbank and townships to the east.

Electricity was cut to Loch Sport. The only road in was closed and train services were suspended.

On Tuesday morning, 650 firefighters were working on the fires at Briagolong and Loch Sport, tackling spot fires that had developed up to 11 kilometres ahead of the Briagolong fire. As the fire continued to head south, Stratford residents were told to leave and head to the Gippsland Regional Sports Complex in Sale, which had been set up as a relief centre.

Briagolong Fire Brigade Captain John Hammett (pictured right) attended the bushfire on Sunday morning. The initial call came from the local general store owner, also a Briagolong brigade member, who could see smoke coming from the hills in native forest.



"It's always been our worst nightmare, to get a fire in that area," John said.

John, his wife Heather (also a CFA member) and Briagolong brigade members headed to a property threatened by fire. Access was difficult and the crew had to make their way through fire activity.

"When we got there the shed was on fire and the fire was right around the house. The owner came out and said he woke up and there was fire all around him," John said.

"All we knew at that stage was the fire was right around the house. We couldn't determine the size of it until later when we realised it had come from down the hill somewhere."

The crew battled the blaze but sadly the mudbrick home couldn't be saved.

"We thought we saved it, then the next minute it was burning again."

John spent the week organising strike teams and food.

"A couple of times I tried to duck home to have a sleep, then two more strike teams came in.

"The whole community made a huge effort, not just the brigade members. Everyone was prepared to help."

Heavy rain from the west reached Gippsland on Tuesday afternoon and continued into Wednesday, reducing the fires' threat.



Vale Greg Godkin

CFA honoured long-serving volunteer and fire investigator Greg Godkin who recently passed away after returning from operational duties.

Greg's family and friends and Donald Fire Brigade colleagues were joined by CFA Chair Greg Wilson, CEO Natalie MacDonald and Chief Officer Jason Heffernan, as Greg was farewelled with full CFA honours.

The service, attended by hundreds of residents, heard about Greg's many decades of service to CFA. He joined in 1965 as a Junior member and held a range of roles including captain of Donald brigade, group officer and VFBV delegate. He was well known not only across District 18 but across the region because of his role as a fire Investigator.

Chief Officer Heffernan presented Greg's family with an Outstanding Service Medal to acknowledge his work.



Bushfire trauma sleep trial

CFA responders are eligible to participate in a new clinical trial which seeks to develop a program to help those suffering from sleep disturbance related to bushfire trauma.

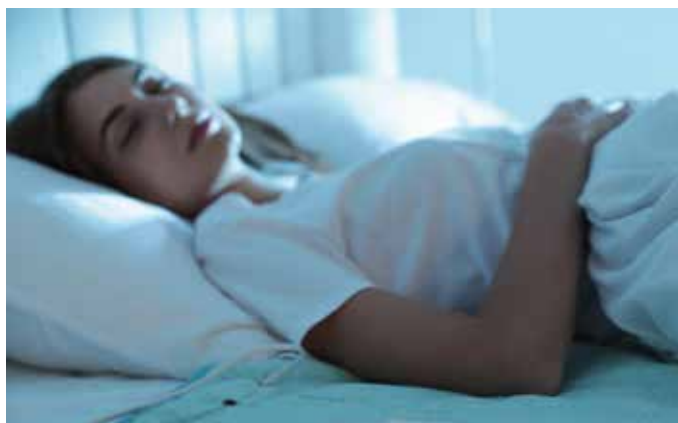
Sleep disturbance could include insomnia, nightmares, flashbacks and other trauma symptoms.

Supported by Natural Hazards Research Australia and Federation University Australia, the four or eight-week trial involves an online, self-paced, sleep-specific intervention called Sleep Best-i (<https://sleepwell1copy.healthzone.org.au>).

Led by clinical psychologist Fadia Isaac, as part of the Centre's online cognitive-behavioural intervention to treat insomnia and nightmares in bushfire survivors, the trial comprises five modules. Participants are asked about their experience with bushfires and to rate their severity of sleep and trauma responses. The five modules explore sleep hygiene, sleep scheduling, controlling distractions, nightmares, methods to deal with PTSD symptoms, rescripting nightmares and strategies for relapse prevention.

"The hope is that Sleep Best-i will give individuals increasing self-governance when it comes to their mental health and sleep patterns," Fadia said.

"Many people who are suffering post-bushfire trauma have to overcome significant barriers to receiving treatment, especially those who live remotely or feel stigma when seeking face-to-face treatment. This self-paced intervention is done at home, giving people self-governance and greater privacy when seeking help for their sleep disturbances."



The trial is accessible to most people as it doesn't require participants to be connected to complex sleep devices. All you need is a smart phone or computer.

Doing the trial will greatly improve the participants' knowledge of sleep difficulties and how they develop after a bushfire. It will also help to improve mental health risks after experiencing bushfire trauma, a critical factor for emergency responders.

To find out more and register visit <https://sleepwell1copy.healthzone.org.au>

STORY LINA WOODS, NATURAL HAZARDS RESEARCH AUSTRALIA

QUARTERLY OPERATIONAL UPDATE



Chief Officer's Message for Summer 2023

As expected, Victoria has seen a warm start to this year's fire season. Not only are we busier at home this year compared to recent years, but we are also supporting multiple interstate deployments.

With time to prepare coming to an end, it is now time for us to put our training and experience into practice.

This Quarterly Operational Update includes information about:

- radio traffic management
- fatigue management
- strike team preparation

I encourage all members to consider how the information shared in this operational update can be incorporated into brigade, group and district operations, training and exercises. As we know, discussing and exercising safe ways of working outside of an emergency is always a better option than trying to come up with ideas in the heat of the moment.

Weather changes

The changing weather conditions over the past few months have seen us responding to several out-of-control burn-offs. I expect this is a sign of what we have ahead of us in terms of bush and grassfire activity for the summer period of 2023-24.

As some states are responding to their first bushfires this season and the Fire Danger Ratings are starting to increase, I would like to bring to your attention the potential for further interstate deployments. CFA has had teams deployed to Queensland, New South Wales and Northern Territory. However, we remain focused on ensuring that our resources are ready to prepare and respond to fires here in Victoria.

The overall seasonal fire outlook shows an expectation for below median rainfall across large parts of Victoria during the 2023-24 fire season. This forecast aligns with historic trends of increased fire risk, particularly in the north and west, as well as elevated wildfire potential in forested and grassland regions. In summary, this fire season sees a return to what could be described as a more normal picture of potential fire risk across the state.

After-action reviews

I would also like to take the opportunity to touch on the importance of after-action reviews (AARs). By conducting AARs we provide an opportunity for our members to share their experiences and their views about how we responded to an incident. This could be a simple hot debrief conducted after returning to the station, or it might be a more formal discussion in the days after a more significant event.

By taking the time to consider what our objectives were, what we did and what we might do differently, we are ensuring that we are always doing our very best work. This form of learning can provide lessons that may be applicable beyond your brigade or district. The lessons may be relevant to all of CFA and will allow us to continuously improve ourselves and, most importantly, to provide the best possible service to our community.

Case studies

This update also includes two case studies with key lessons that we all need to be aware of. The first case study focuses on the lessons learned from a tanker collision, and the second on a significant fire with asbestos risk and limited water supply.

Minimum safety requirements

Our work environment is high risk and I want CFA members to return home safely every time. While we cannot control everything around us, there are some things we can do to be as safe as possible. My expectation that operational members have currency in the following requirements remains unchanged:

- General Firefighter/Minimum Skills
- Hazardous tree package
- Entrapment drill

I would like to acknowledge the valuable work that each of you contributes and the impacts that this may have on you and your families. Thank you for your continued commitment to CFA and the communities of Victoria.

Keep yourself and your loved ones safe as we move into the fire season.

To access the Quarterly Operational Update material and other topics of interest, go to members.cfa.vic.gov.au/brigades-operational/resources/quarterly-operational-updates or scan the QR code.



Strike team preparation

A strike team is a group of three to seven vehicles of similar type deployed to a large incident and managed by a strike team leader (STL) in a field command vehicle (FCV).

What is a strike team?

Each vehicle has a crew of four or five operational members, led by a crew leader. The FCV usually has three members: the STL, the STL's assistant and a driver.

All members need to be at least aged 18 years old and must hold minimum wildfire skills (GFF), current entrapment drill and hazardous trees training, as well as compliance with COVID-19 requirements.

Personal preparation

A strike team deployment can be a very rewarding experience in your CFA career. However, it can also be a stressful time for you, your crew and your family. The fire front can move at an unexpected speed as wind and weather changes can be disastrous. Conditions can be most distressing due to heat, high winds and potential unfamiliar territory.

When being deployed to a major rural fire, you may not be involved in your own brigade area, on your brigade vehicle, or with your own brigade members. Your own personal preparation will be a large factor in your performance and safety.

Physical and mental fitness and capabilities

Be aware of your own limitations and check:

- your fitness level
- heat stress
- your physical strength
- your physical disabilities
- tiredness/fatigue.

After a long day of work, you are required to assess if you are physically fit enough to tackle a possible major and prolonged incident.

As well as your physical fitness, you should pay close attention to your mental fitness. Mental fatigue and stress levels have a large impact on your ability to complete tasks to the required standards. It is always safer for you and your crew members to be honest about your ability to perform a task and where your limits are.

Notify your captain/crew leader of any considerations they need to be aware of, or if you can't perform a task assigned to you.

Talk to your family and employer

If you have not already done so, now is a good time to sit down with your family and employer to establish a clear understanding of your involvement with CFA. We advise you to discuss some ground rules to reduce the potential for confusion and unrest if a significant fire should occur.



Here are some suggestions for a conversation with your family:

- Can you be away from home for several days?
- Does your family need support while you're away?
- Are there financial implications for your family?
- Will your children be worried about you?
- Are there any important family events scheduled?
- Who to contact in the event of an emergency?
- Does your family understand what a strike team deployment is?

Here are some suggestions for a conversation with your employer:

- Provide them with the Employer Information Brochure.
- Explain the role of a CFA volunteer firefighter.
- Ask if you can leave work for a fire/incident.
- Which type of leave will be used for deployments?
- How much notice does your employer require?
- What is the impact on your employer and other employees?
- There must be mutual understanding and agreement between you and your employer about the length of time you may be away from your employment.

If your employer requires evidence of your participation in a CFA strike team deployment, your district office can supply a letter.

Other considerations

- Always check with your employer before nominating for a strike team and ensure you have the appropriate rest before returning to work.
- CFA does not encourage members to deploy on consecutive strike teams. You are required to have three or four days' rest between deployments. This is for the health and safety of you and your team.
- When possible, members of the wellbeing team will be available at staging areas or in the incident area. It is advised to use their services during or after a deployment. CFA strives to keep its members in good physical and mental health. Please reach out to your STL or catchment team who will confidentially make arrangements.

REDUCING FATIGUE

General tips to minimise the impact of fatigue in and outside CFA



Investigating **25 years** of CFA data shows:

Fatigue is a contributor in

1 in 5

CFA injuries



CFA members are

3 times

more likely to be injured between 12am and 5am

Fatigue is a major contributor in

50%

of night-time injuries



What is **FATIGUE**?

Fatigue is tiredness that impacts your ability to function normally and safely

Common causes are:

- Poor quality sleep
- Sleep deprivation
- Being awake during the night
- Intense mental/physical activity
- Long work hours
- Not enough rest between shifts
- Stress
- Long travel times

Signs and symptoms include:

- Falling asleep accidentally
- Difficulty focusing
- Poor coordination
- Unable to think clearly
- Not aware of surroundings
- Difficulty controlling emotions
- Making lots of mistakes
- Reacting slowly

TIPS TO REDUCE FATIGUE

Fatigue risks can't be eliminated, but awareness and prevention can reduce the impacts. Please also familiarise yourself with CFA policy and guidelines on fatigue



Get between **7 and 9 hours** of sleep each night



Only 1 person in every 4 million is fully rested after 6 hours of sleep (that's only 7 in all Australia)



Seek natural light

Natural light adjusts our internal body clocks, aim to get at least 20minutes



Avoid caffeine after midday

Caffeine stays in our body for 12+ hours; avoiding it after midday will help sleeping



Avoid artificial light before going to sleep

Artificial light (like our phones) signals our body that it's time to be awake



Reduce alcohol before going to sleep

Alcohol sedates our body and disrupts the restorative phases of sleeping

Keep a regular sleep schedule all week



Avoid sleep-ins on weekends to ensure better sleep quality and less overall fatigue

Night-shift tips

You are **8 times more likely** to have an accident on your first night-shift

Before the shift

- Nap before starting your shift
- Drink coffee/tea before or early in the shift


During the shift

- Seek bright white light
- Take breaks in well-lit areas
- Stay hydrated
- Take a nap if possible. Aim for 20 minutes, so you don't feel drowsy when waking.

After the shift

- Sleep in a cool, dark and quiet place
- Aim to get back to your regular routine
- Get enough sleep but don't sleep in too late to make sure you are tired in the evening

by **DREAMERS**

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Radio traffic management during a response

Clear communication can play a vital role in the response to a fire or incident. As CFA strives to provide the best possible service to our community, the information here is a refresher for all operational brigade members and those who use radios for operational communication.

It is important that radio discipline is maintained and that communication adheres to the agreed protocols.

Practising how to speak on a radio in a calm way and at an even pace, as well as maintaining a three to five second pause to listen for other radio traffic before transmitting your message, will ensure clear communication and prevent cutting over others or having your message cut off.

Consider writing down any word-backs, situation reports or messages that you need to communicate before transmitting, especially detailed ones.

District communications plans

Familiarise yourself with, and use, agreed district communications plans, especially for escalating fires and incidents. It is important to move away from dispatch channels and onto the fireground/ command channels as early as possible. Radio traffic with FireCom can quickly become congested, so additional channels have been added in recent years to better enable fireground communications to occur away from busy dispatch channels. Establish control points and initiate the use of fireground channels early on and direct communications through these rather than the main dispatch channels.

Non-urgent communication

Non-urgent notifications, such as reporting vehicle mechanical faults or other administrative messages that are not directly related to a response, should be managed via mobile phone where possible and directly with the state or district duty officer.

Non-urgent matters must not be requested over dispatch channels unless no other communications options are available. This applies especially where ESTA is patching a number of district dispatch channels together and therefore messages are broadcast over multiple district channels simultaneously.

The additional channels that have been allocated can be used to communicate the more administrative detail or to communicate directly with a district command centre, local command facility or incident control centre and should be established early in a fire or incident where it is determined that this type of communications structure is required.



When to use dispatch channels

Resources or personnel not directly dispatched should avoid talking on dispatch channels, particularly at escalating events where radio congestion will already be difficult to manage. If your brigade or resource has not been activated via EAS pager, it is likely it has not been requested. Allow the incident controller to make this decision. Do not self-activate over the radio unless you are in the immediate vicinity, are in an appropriate resource, capable and available to assist.

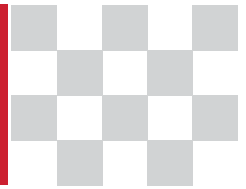
EAS pager

It is important to have your EAS pager with you at all times. EAS pagers are the primary method of alerting CFA members and have a prominent level of coverage and reliability. Mobile phone coverage varies across the state and is not as widespread as EAS coverage.

CFA does not control factors such as your mobile service provider and coverage that may affect the ability to receive a message on your mobile phone. For the highest level of reliability of receiving notice of a fire call, please turn on and carry your EAS pager.

The mobile phone-based SAS application is supplementary to EAS and it is encouraged that this is used in addition to, but not instead of, carrying your EAS pager. The official CFA redundancy to EAS pager is the CFA Alert Conference system (formerly Spectrum) where identified members of a brigade will receive a conference call in the rare instance that the EAS pagers do not activate. Check that your CFA Alert Conference details are up to date and appropriate members of your brigade and/or neighbouring brigades are on this system.

Your assistance with these important matters is greatly appreciated and when done correctly will assist with more safe, effective and efficient management of fires and incidents.



‘Big Watermelon’ cool store fire

Summary

Mid-afternoon on 17 January 2023, Scoresby Fire Brigade was called to a cool store fire at a warehouse in Wantirna South. The fire was complex and posed a significant exposure risk to firefighters because of the asbestos wall cladding and the large amount of ammonia refrigerant stored on site. The fire was well managed and involved a variety of responding resources including tankers, pumpers, aircraft, drone, hose layer and specialist hazmat appliances.

Incident overview

At 3pm multiple calls were received about a large column of black smoke coming from a cold storage warehouse at a fruit and vegetable business in Wantirna South. Firefighters in the area also radioed FireCom to report the visible smoke. Initially, Scoresby Fire Brigade was responded alongside FRV Pumpers 28 and 85. This was quickly escalated by the Fire Services Communications Controller (FSCC) to make pumpers five.

Pumper 85 was first on scene and it was confirmed that a factory of about 100 metres x 40 metres in size was fully alight. The first crews established that everyone on site was accounted for. There were several control transfers in the early stages of the incident, with a Scoresby Fire Brigade lieutenant assuming control 20 minutes after the first truck arrived.

There was a significant amount of wall cladding containing asbestos on the building, large volumes of ammonia refrigerant stored on site and a power substation on the building's southern end. In addition, it was a warm day, about 33°C, and there were concerns the fire may spread to surrounding grasslands.

Throughout the incident, further resources were requested. In total there were six pumpers, two waterbombing aircraft, two hazmat vehicles/pods, one field operations vehicle (FOV), 10 tankers and a drone for aerial intelligence.

The two aircraft and roof and ground monitors suppressed the fire. This combination allowed for the maximum flow of water available, ensuring crews and trucks were clear of smoke, asbestos hazards and away from the potential collapse zone of the structure.

The incident was brought under control, though there was significant structural collapse. There was some minor fire spread to trees on the western side, but no other exposures were damaged.

Crews were committed to this fire for 26 hours with handover to the municipal building surveyor and property owners at 5pm on 18 January. It was determined that the fire started in one of the cool rooms, but the cause of ignition could not be determined.

What worked well

Strategies and tactics: The strategies and tactics established by the initial incident controller (IC) proved to be safe and effective for the extinguishment phase. These strategies and tactics also allowed firefighters to manage fatigue while operating under a range of adverse circumstances.

Sectorisation: Initial sectorisation was established by identifying sectors 1, 2, 3 and 4 in a clockwise manner around the building. This is a simple and effective naming convention that is commonly applied in the structural firefighting environment.



Hazmat vehicle response: A hazmat sector was established in consultation with onsite management and a refrigeration technician. Crews in this sector were tasked with identifying any ammonia risk to firefighters and neighbouring properties through atmospheric monitoring. Crews also liaised with onsite experts to determine whether any bulk ammonia storage remained present or whether it had burned off in the initial stages of the fire.

Hose laying vehicle: Scoresby Fire Brigade's hose layer was used effectively at this fire. To help overcome water supply issues, the hose layer laid approximately one kilometre of 100mm large diameter hose within 10 minutes of arriving on scene. It is common practice that the crew leader of the hose layer takes on the role of the water supply sector commander. The IC should consider requesting the relevant water authority to send a representative to form part of the incident emergency management team (IEMT).

Alternative water supplies: Water was draughted from a static water supply using pumpers. The resourcing of an entire sector with tankers (used to ferry water) ensured sufficient water supply to the fireground despite the limitations of the reticulated supply.

Drones: Remotely piloted aircraft systems (RPAS) were also responded to this fire. Drones with infra-red cameras flew over the structure during the overhaul stage and informed aircraft and ground monitors to the presence of any hotspots.

Shift planning and resourcing: Resource planning by Knox Group and local brigades ensured sufficient rotation of crews throughout the 26-hour duration of the incident. This included 'skeleton resourcing' from midnight to 7am to ensure calls from passers-by were not received and local brigades were not disturbed overnight.

Warnings and advice: An advice message was issued early and updated throughout the fire. It is best practice that the onsite IC refers to the VicEmergency App when messaging is issued or updated to ensure it is correct. During operations, the IC noted that the polygon was not accurate when considering on-site wind conditions and was able to quickly request an amendment via the district duty officer.

Lessons identified

Transfer of control: At all incidents, consider the best time for transfer of control between ICs. Transfer of control does not necessarily need to occur immediately when the control agency arrives. It should be at a time that allows the incident to be appropriately and safely managed. It is best practice when transferring control at a complex incident for the incoming and outgoing ICs to walk around the entire incident (360-degree size-up) to discuss issues and the handover. Transfer of control should be undertaken in accordance with Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) 8.04 Transfer of Control.

Multi-agency communications: Managing two radio networks (MMR and RMR) and multiple channels at any incident where both CFA and FRV respond can present challenges. Contacting other agency commanders to form part of the IEMT at the earliest opportunity will ensure that all agencies are appropriately included and aware of the incident communications plan.

Staging area management: Establishing a staging area in the wildfire environment is common practice. However, staging areas should also be considered in the structural firefighting environment. Although a staging area was set up at this incident to receive incoming relief crews, not all crews were responded to this location. When a staging area is established, all responding vehicles must be told to use it.

All arriving relief crews should hold at the staging area until they are tasked. Before commencing work, crew leaders must report to the relevant sector commander for a briefing. The control point should be informed of any resource movements so that appropriate resource tracking can occur.

District control centre (DCC): Districts commonly stand up DCCs during the Fire Danger Period, though they can also be stood up to provide support to operations for any complex incident. At this incident, the DCC was established but used only in a limited capacity. Undertaking functions such as planning, public information and logistics support may be better placed to occur within a DCC or local command facility rather than on the fireground.

Questions for your brigade

- How would you go about managing the asbestos risk both during and after the incident?
- Does your brigade establish sectors for structure fires? Within the structural environment, have you considered allocating sectors by numbers (1, 2, 3, 4 in a clockwise fashion)?
- What other strategies could be implemented to secure a sufficient water supply on site?

Conclusion

This incident was a strong display of interoperability between all responding agencies. Effective collaboration through the sharing of resources, personnel, equipment and knowledge ensured prompt extinguishment of the fire while limiting exposures. Despite the complex nature of this incident, the risks were managed safely and professionally by all responding crews.



Tanker collision at Tahara

Summary

In mid-February 2022, there was an incident in South West Region where a CFA tanker had its nearside door severely damaged after colliding with the rear offside corner of another tanker. Despite the slow to medium speed when the impact occurred, the collision resulted in a CFA firefighter receiving stitches to his hand after being cut by broken glass.

Incident overview

A grass and scrub fire started in South West Region in mid-February 2022 that resulted in a call for 20 tankers and four water bombers to assist with controlling the fire. After burning approximately five kilometres from its point of origin, it quickly approached a road and threatened to impact several properties.

Some trucks were tasked with asset protection of a farmhouse. One of these tankers ran out of water and a crew member knew of a water source a few hundred metres down the road. The crew decided that three members would refill the tanker while one member stayed behind. At the same time, another tanker arrived a few hundred metres from the farmhouse and attempted to extinguish the fire at the fence line.

The road at the incident location is a sealed, single lane road, which placed limitations on the tankers. There was also a medium gradient downhill slope in the direction of travel. The fire burned into Phalaris grass near the road edge which, coupled with strong winds, caused thick dark smoke to blanket and blow across the road. There was almost zero visibility.

The tanker working on the fence line had to pull off the road and wait for the smoke to clear. It then reversed back a short distance and stopped. The truck was off the road enough so that only its rear was on the edge of the road. The driver was concerned about moving further forward because of the low visibility and the slope. The tanker did not have warning beacons or flashing headlights operating during or after the manoeuvre.

Shortly after, the tanker that was on its way to refill with water travelled down the same road at about 30 to 40km/hour through the heavy smoke with limited visibility. It collided with the rear offside corner of the parked tanker, resulting in severe damage to the front nearside door. This shattered the glass which caused lacerations to the left hand of the firefighter in the passenger seat. The tanker continued along the road for a few metres until visibility improved enough to do a U-turn and go back to see what they had hit. The group officer (GO) was contacted and they checked that all firefighters were uninjured. The GO also checked that the firefighters felt safe to continue, which they did using both tankers on the condition that no one sat in the passenger seat of the damaged tanker.

The incident was also reported to the incident control centre and no vehicle check was completed at the time. The firefighter with the injured hand was taken to the farmhouse where he administered first-aid to the laceration, then continued with asset protection of the sheds at the farmhouse.

An ambulance arrived at the farmhouse 40 minutes after the incident. The injured firefighter was assessed and taken to the nearest hospital, where he received five stitches in his hand. Both tankers were removed from the fireground when the fire was deemed under control and taken to the staging area where the collision investigator commenced the collision investigation.

To maintain currency with the required safe driving procedures with CFA vehicles, members should refer to the following doctrine.

CFA Chief Officer's Standing Orders:

- 12.00: Drive and operate CFA vehicles

CFA Chief Officer's Standard Operating Procedures:

- 12.01: Drive and travel in CFA or ESO vehicles
- 12.02: Drive under emergency response conditions
- 12.04: Collisions involving CFA vehicles



Lessons identified

Hazard perception: Both tanker drivers missed several hazards, including the hazard of driving through almost zero visibility smoke at a speed of 30 to 40km/hour and the hazard of parking close to the road edge in almost zero visibility smoke.

Perceived time pressure: Members decision-making and risk assessments were impacted by a perceived time pressure. There was pressure to extinguish the fire before it crossed the road because the terrain on the other side would make it very difficult to fight the fire using tankers.

Communication: There was a lack of communication between the vehicles in the vicinity of the incident scene, which impacted the situational awareness of all responding crews.

Experience of drivers: The driver of the parked tanker had the appropriate licence, but had only driven on a fireground on one occasion before the incident.

Notifications: It is vital that members ensure Victoria Police is also notified of any collision resulting in injury as per the Road Safety Act. This was not done in this instance.

Beacons: It is important that members use beacons to ensure other vehicles can see them, particularly when operating in an area with limited to no visibility.

Conclusion

This incident highlights the importance of remaining aware of risks at all times during a response. Perceived time pressure should not impact your

perception of hazards, risks and personal safety. Thank you to the members involved for their openness in sharing their experience and lessons.

SAFE DRIVING REMINDERS



Tankers must not drive on a cross slope greater than 15 degrees.



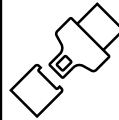
Drivers must stay away from soft edges as the edge may collapse.



Drivers must continuously assess the conditions and drive accordingly.



Drivers must assess how sharp a corner is, if there is reverse camber and drive at a safe speed.



Wear a seatbelt at all times



Importance of after-action reviews

After-action reviews (AAR) help everyone to learn from both mistakes and achievements. By applying learning a team can improve and perform to higher standards.

The spirit of an AAR is one of openness and learning. It is not about fixing or allocating blame. Lessons are not only shared by the individuals

involved but can also be documented and shared more widely in CFA for continuous improvement.

The best way to share AARs is to send them to the catchment officer and emailing them to aar@cfa.vic.gov.au.

Many products are developed by sharing these lessons such as the Quarterly Operational Update, case studies, training programs and much more.

What was planned?



What happened?



Why did it happen?



What would we do differently next time?

Victorian fire season campaign kicks off

The 'How well do you know fire?' campaign, which launched in 2019, has positively impacted communities by addressing complacency and reinforcing positive behaviours to prepare and respond to fires.

Extensive market research shows 'How well do you know fire?' continues to effectively prompt Victorians to think about planning and preparing for grass and bushfires. It will continue to emphasise how everyone has a shared responsibility to stay safe and how unpredictable fires can be.

In line with previous years, there will be key campaign phases. These include:

- early messaging alerting Victoria to a hot and dry fire season
- plan and prepare and Fire Danger Rating messaging from mid-November to end of December
- leave early, urban fringe and travelling in high-risk areas messaging from December until the end of summer
- emergency advertising activated as required on Extreme and Catastrophic Fire Danger Rating days.

These messages will be promoted through TV, radio, print, online, digital, social media and out-of-home advertising throughout summer.

Coinciding with the 'plan and prepare' phase, Victorians are, for the first time, being directed to visit fireplanner.vic.gov.au to learn more. The new online fire planner, which was developed as part of the campaign, allows users create an online fire plan that can be customised to their needs and shared with friends and family.

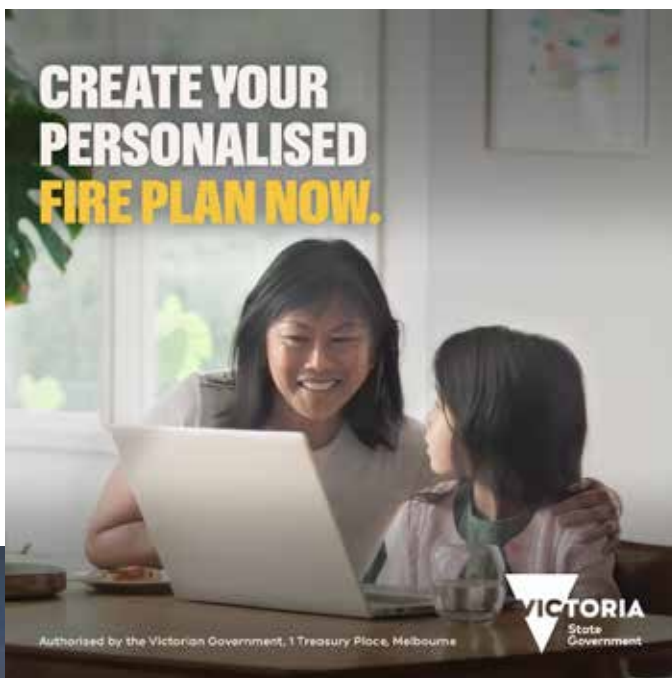
This year's campaign will also feature assets created for the Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS) to inform the

public about the system and the actions they need to take.

The 'plan and prepare' assets and other assets will be available for use by brigades through the Community Engagement Content Portal (www.cfa.vic.gov.au/cecontentportal). The portal will be updated with new assets as the campaign progresses, so please check back for the most recent resources.

More information can be found here: members.cfa.vic.gov.au/resources/campaigns/summer-fire-season-campaign

STORY NANCY THOMPSON



**YOU CAN'T CONTROL FIRE,
BUT YOU CAN PREPARE FOR IT.**

The best way to keep you and your loved ones safe this fire season, is to make sure you have a fire plan.

Go to fireplanner.vic.gov.au to create your personalised fire plan now.

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW FIRE?

Authorised by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne





TARRAWINGEE FIRES 80TH ANNIVERSARY

In the depths of World War Two 1943, Australian troops were fighting in numerous theatres of war across the world. But many thousands of miles away, back in Victoria, the bushfire threat remained ever present.

On a hot, blustery day, 22 December, a small fire broke out near the Hume Highway north of Wangaratta not far from the rural community of Tarrawingee. As the alarm rang out, volunteers, farm trucks and brigade units raced to the scene. Among those who jumped onto trucks were two 14-year-old schoolboys, work mates knocking off for the day from their jobs as linesmen for the then Post Master General (PMG) department, a teacher at the local school, a factory worker and several farmers.

Most had no property in the area but considered it their duty to try to protect life and property, with so many men overseas fighting the war.

The fire quickly spread east, jumping roads and a local creek. The trucks ran parallel to the fire trying to get ahead of the blaze and halt it with various fire breaks. In many cases, those on the frontline had little more than branches, beaters and wet sacks, with only one fire truck carrying water tanks.

When the wind changed, many were trapped and the situation quickly turned deadly, as outlined below in 'Make Tankers Ten', the historic record of the Wangaratta Group.

"The driver of the Wangaratta Unit tried to turn the truck around but amid the smoke and ash that had engulfed them he failed to see a roadside drain. As he tried to turn the truck, the front wheels became embedded in the drain, causing the chassis to belly, leaving the truck unable to move.

Confusion reigned. Men panicked. Some tried to shelter behind trees, while others ran trying to get to the Ovens River. Unfortunately, some were caught in fences and, sadly, a number of men were badly burnt. Some survived to tell the tale, others tragically lost their lives. Many of the men who lost their lives made it to hospital but their bodies were so badly burnt that they died."

In the hours that followed, the local community quickly learned that 10 men (including the teenage boys) had perished or died shortly after.

A wave of grief swept over the Wangaratta and Tarrawingee area as they attended a succession of funerals. The two schoolboys were buried on Christmas Day.

The memory of the Tarrawingee fire lives on, through children who never knew their fathers and still can't comprehend the enormity of the tragedy. You can read the stories of those who lost their lives and view reflections from descendants on Members Online: members.cfa.vic.gov.au/resources/events/tarrawingee-fires

In the aftermath, a coronial inquest could not determine the cause of the fire, with many theories about what had happened.

The Premier and Governor of Victoria toured the region promising to replace the fire unit which had burned, while a relief fund was set up to help the families of those who lost their lives.

In Memoriam

Godfrey Spencer, 53, school teacher Wangaratta

Andrew Joseph Guthrie, 45, farm manager, Tarrawingee

John Wolstenholme Marks, 29, farmer, Markwood

Arthur Willesley Wellington, 46, farmer, Markwood

Theodore Luke Lea, 32, foreman Huttons Bacon Factory, Wangaratta

Joseph Louis Ryan, 38, postal linesman, Wangaratta

Edward Laurence Seymour, 33, telephone linesman, Wangaratta

Norman John Robinson, 49, postal linesman, Wangaratta

Kevin Dunkley, 14, schoolboy, Londrigan

Henry Claude Hill, 14, schoolboy, East Wangaratta



The Tarrawingee fire and other significant blazes that summer came a few years after the Black Friday fires, eventually resulting in the formation of CFA in 1945.

A monument was unveiled in 1944 on the Great Alpine Road near where the fire occurred in memory of the fallen firefighters at Tarrawingee. It shows the names of each of those who died. A separate plaque at the Wangaratta post office honours the three PMG linesmen who turned out that day.

Local brigades and community members gather each year to honour and pay tribute to those who lost their lives. This year marks the 80th anniversary of the tragedy, with a special memorial service to be held on Friday 23 December in Tarrawingee.

Tarrawingee Brigade member Graeme Norman has spent years researching the tragedy.

"All those men and the boys came out to help the landowners," Graeme said. They volunteered to come out and help, gave their lives. None of them owned any land in Tarra, they didn't own anything. They were just prepared to come out and help when a lot of people were away at war. All they had were soaked old hessian bags.

"It's a tragedy that Wangaratta and district had never seen before and hopefully will never see again."

Betty Canning, daughter of Joseph Ryan, a linesman for the PMG, was almost three years old when the fires occurred. She said her father joined his colleagues that day out of a sense of duty.

"I think when his two mates went, he went too," Betty said. "They just knocked off from work and all went for a drink at the hotel. They were calling for volunteers and the three of them volunteered."

"Dad said 'well, I can't be long because it's Lilla's [Betty's mother's] birthday today. I've got to get home'. Then mum looked out and she said all this black smoke went up and she thought that's a truck."

"I think everyone panicked that day. They went down Petticoat Lane trying to put it out with the leather beaters, that's all they had. I wish it hadn't happened. I wish they hadn't gone."

Her father was buried on 23 December. "The bells just tolled and tolled, day after day. They were buried one after another."

Edward Seymour, a PMG workmate of Joseph Ryan, also answered the call that day and died. His son Des is proud that his father volunteered to help others and would have loved to have known him.

"I never really knew my father because I was only 13 months old. My mum never ever got over it. She couldn't talk about it," Des said. "If I'd been a bit older and known him, I think it would have hurt more. The only thing I have is a photo."

"They were emergency volunteer firefighters and naturally when the fire happened they all jumped to it. It would have been that black and I think you wouldn't have seen what you were doing. It happened on the spur of the moment."

"Imagine putting yourself in the position of those families. Burying them on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day."

Graeme, Des and Betty hope the 80th anniversary of the fires will be an opportunity for people to learn more about what happened that day and honour those who gave their lives to protect their community.

With thanks to the authors of 'Make Tankers Ten', Tarrawingee Fire Brigade and Graeme Norman.



Top to bottom:

The memorial built in 1944
Des Seymour and Betty Canning
Graeme Norman



Radio Replacement Program on track

CFA's Radio Replacement Program will deliver more than 18,000 CFA radios across the state including all mobiles, portables, bag radios, vehicle-mounted repeaters and local bases.

A three-month pilot of radio products suitable to operate on the CFA radio network started in March 2023 involving 15 brigades across Districts 5, 13, 14, 20 and 22. Additional pilots and product validation were carried out in Districts 2 and 16.

The pilot has been extended to trial new portable radio holders installed into brigade vehicles and a new configuration of a 16-position rotary knob on the portable radios. CFA is moving towards all radios being dual band, except for certain brigade local base radios that don't require this capability.

The project team is in discussion with a radio provider, Emergency Management Victoria and Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority about the quantities of radios needed following an initiative involving all districts. This initiative created fleet allocation maps that documented every vehicle in every brigade that will receive a radio.

The program will continue to finalise the configuration and channel plan of the new radios, which will include multi-agency and interstate channels.

Timelines for delivery will depend on the radio provider, but we expect the radios will be rolled out over a 12 to 18-month period.

STORY JESS RIDDOCH

New online wellbeing training

At CFA, the environments we volunteer and work in are unique, varied, rewarding and challenging. We want CFA to be a psychologically healthy and safe place where members feel safe, well, included and valued.

To support your own and your team's mental health and wellbeing, there are new online learning modules. Members can self-nominate to complete the training on the Learning Hub – learninghub.cfa.vic.gov.au.

This training was developed for CFA by CFA and includes videos and personal stories featuring our volunteers and staff. It is designed to equip members with the knowledge and skills needed to recognise and manage risks to psychological health, increase awareness of available support, and encourage them to seek help early.

There are two modules available – one for all members and a second for members in leadership roles.

The first module, 'Mind matters: psychological health and safety at CFA', builds knowledge and skills to support mental health and wellbeing for ourselves and others. It covers: psychological health and safety, risk factors and protective factors; the Mental Health Continuum; having conversations about mental health and wellbeing; the Five Ways to

Wellbeing; and support services available for CFA members and their families.

The second module, 'CFA leading for wellbeing', acknowledges that leaders have a critical role in enabling and supporting healthy and safe environments. It's important that leaders can identify psychological hazards and risks and take appropriate steps to decrease or remove the risk if possible.

The module covers: why psychological health and safety is important; benefits of leading with psychological health and safety front of mind; strategies for supporting your own and your members' mental health and wellbeing; wellbeing services available to support leaders, and how to support others.

These packages are the first in a new suite of training resources which includes online training, workshops and supporting resources. We encourage CFA members to complete the training to set the example for others in making mental health a priority at CFA.

If you have a question about these training packages, email wellbeing@cfa.vic.gov.au

STORY CARA MCINTYRE



Faces of CFA

HEATH MARTIN, JUNORTOWN FIRE BRIGADE, DISTRICT 2

What is your CFA role?

I'm the brigade captain, an experienced strike team leader and sector commander. I'm also in the final stages of endorsement as a bushfire fire investigator.

Why did you join?

I joined my local brigade as a Junior in 1996. Back then when you turned 16 you joined your local fire brigade. My dad was a member and has continued to be an active volunteer for almost 55 years.

What incident has had the greatest impact on you?

Black Saturday and the weeks that followed had a significant impact on me as a firefighter but mostly as a person. This experience changed me and while I tried the tough guy 'suck it up' act for a while, it eventually caught up with me.

It was a valuable lesson about the importance of speaking out when you are not OK, and this is something I continue to drill into anyone who will listen. We have access to service providers and support through the Member Assistance Program and CFA's Peer Support Program. Use them. I am still not able to talk about the events of that day much, but it has ultimately shaped me into the more resilient person I am now.

Who have been your mentors in CFA?

I have many amazing mentors, each contributing their unique perspective, skills, guidance and experiences. The key people along the journey so far have been: Geoff Martin (my dad), Noel Honeychurch, Leigh Stephens, Hugh Kelly, Mark Forder, David Cleator, Ray Mundy, Chris Jacobson, Carl Watkins, Luke Carracher and David Brown.

What have been the highlights of your time in CFA?

Being awarded the National Emergency Medal for the 2009 fires and 2019-20 fires, and being part of the team that delivered our new \$2.5 million Junortown Fire Station in 2022.

During the 2022 floods, I led the brigade when we crewed our big fill appliance 24 hours a day for 16 days while it was deployed to Echuca. This included two shuttle trips a day to Echuca in our FCV for crew changeover. A Herculean effort.

How do you motivate your brigade members?

I motivate members through my transformational leadership style. I convey a clear vision of our brigade and broader CFA goals and ensure members feel valued. I have a real passion for what we do and can energise our team through my leadership. I focus on helping members support one another and provide them with my support, skills, guidance and experiences – just as I was mentored.

I provide the guidance and inspiration they need to commit, work hard and perform well. My goals for members are based around personal development, promoting diversity, inclusion, loyalty, respect, motivation, empowerment and leadership.

I have inspired others to review or modify their expectations, perceptions and motivations to work towards our common goals as individuals and as a team.

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

Our future leaders should continue to focus on diversity and inclusion. We need to make sure we are involving all our members in the decision-making process. We need to empower and inspire our members to be the best people they can, give them some skin in the game and make them accountable.

We need to involve members' families in the brigade through social functions and acknowledge family contributions and their support of our members. Through this we will see brigade members thrive, be successful, respectful, honest and loyal to CFA. Successful members will lead to higher retention rates, attract new members, and inspire a greater participation and commitment from existing members.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

What spare time! My wife Lanie, Hudson (Jack Russell) and I get away when we can. We've recently bought a caravan and have planned some trips. I make my own beer and enjoy the science behind it. I'm also a big motorsport fan. I watch everything including F1, IndyCar and NASCAR. I am a loyal Supercars fan and attend the Bathurst 1000 every year.



Stephen's passion for trucks

District mechanical officers (DMO) keep our fleet on the road. We talked to Stephen Puglisi from the Swan Hill workshop, who recently finished his apprenticeship.

Stephen began his CFA apprenticeship in May 2019 while he was in Year 11, and spent a day a week in the workshop.

"I always had a passion for vehicles. I'm from a farming background and enjoyed helping fix vehicles and machinery from an early age," Stephen said.

Stephen had the opportunity to do several stints of school-based work experience and also finished a Certificate II in Automotive Preparation at SuniTAFE, Swan Hill.

"At the time, I didn't know what to do next. At the end of Year 11, a teacher asked me if I was interested in an apprenticeship with a local firm that serviced trucks. I wasn't told I'd be working for CFA," Stephen said. "In fact, when

I was 16 years old, I didn't realise that CFA employed mechanics."

Thanks to having completed the certificate II, Stephen was able to skip some of his training. Stephen studied at SuniTafe during the four-year apprenticeship and has completed a Certificate III Qualified Heavy Vehicle Mechanical Technology. He has now started a one-year contract at the Swan Hill DMO workshop.

"CFA has looked after me really well. It's a friendly environment and I've had the opportunity to talk to volunteers and work on a range of trucks, Toyota LandCruisers and Nissan Patrols.

"CFA also helped me to get my medium rigid truck licence. The workshop manager, Gav, asked me if I wanted to drive a truck. It's handy to be able to move the trucks we work on."

Stephen is enjoying his time at CFA, but he realises that his desire to stay in the Swan Hill area may limit his opportunities with CFA.

"I grew up in this area and my family lives here and I don't want to move away for work," Stephen explained. "I'd be sad if I had to leave CFA, but who knows what might happen in the future? I may get a permanent position with CFA.

"I enjoy the atmosphere at CFA so much that I recently joined my local brigade, Beverford and District, as a volunteer, along with my brother. We both plan on doing the General Firefighter course and being operational members."

STORY DUNCAN RUSSELL

Diamond Creek TEWT success

Diamond Creek's Brigade Management Team (BMT) recently conducted a desktop Tactical Exercise Without Troops (TEWT), which was inspired by a local fire. BMT members analysed the situation, including the possibility of escalation, to determine how they would approach the firefight.

Escalation of the exercise included considering how to manage the fire in the event of it spreading towards the

township of Diamond Creek. A range of considerations were given to the BMT at the start of the TEWT including:

- commencing with small, manageable incidents
- ensuring the TEWT was viewed as a safe space for discussion and questions
- coming together as a team and working collaboratively to determine approaches to challenges
- considering relevant SOP doctrine, including SOP 9.28 Strategy and Tactics:
 - Establish control
 - Size-up
 - RECEO
 - Risk assessments
 - Pre-plans
 - Strategy – defensive or offensive
 - SMEACS
 - Community messaging
 - State priorities.

Resources were sourced to facilitate the TEWT. These included a range of repurposed toys (emergency services vehicles, aircraft, earthmoving

equipment, houses and livestock), as well as large, professionally-printed and laminated maps. Maps comprised four enlarged A0 Vicmap pages, which when combined measured 2.4 metres by 1.7 metres. TEWT maps depicted the north-west aspect of Diamond Creek, an area considered high bushfire risk. PDF vector maps ensured sharp map lines.

The exercise was very successful. Participants gained confidence in their ability to command and control a situation, while also increasing their understanding of what was required of the officer in charge. The oversized maps and 3D props used allowed the BMT to easily understand and assess the situation, while additional resources (such as supplementary maps) were also highly valuable.

The BMT is eager to undertake more TEWTs, while also using them as a way to mentor and upskill upcoming brigade leaders.

STORY NOEL FARMER, DIAMOND CREEK BRIGADE CAPTAIN



Trafalgar's young people sign up for Juniors

Trafalgar Fire Brigade started a Junior Volunteer Development Program (JVDP) in 2018, kicking off with an open day for potential recruits, their parents and carers to learn about the program. Meeting once a month for two hours during the first two years of operation, the program started with more than 10 new recruits, a lot of enthusiasm and fantastic support of the whole brigade.

During COVID-19, Trafalgar brigade retained Junior members by running the online JuniorsLIVE program. This allowed the Junior leaders to stay in touch, as well as offered Juniors valuable peer support. The JuniorsLIVE program was a great success, and the Junior members were appreciative of the effort the brigade made to stay in contact.

After COVID-19 restrictions lifted, Trafalgar brigade moved forward with a recruitment campaign, visiting schools and promoting the JVDP to potential members. By implementing a fun, active and exciting training regime the brigade managed to grow its JVDP membership. The Juniors now meet twice a month.

"We gather ideas from the Junior leader Facebook page, as well as discuss activities with other Junior brigades," Trafalgar Captain and Junior Leader Mark Walshe said. "We then tweak the activities to suit our brigade needs and after we have run an exercise we ask the Juniors to give us their thoughts for improvements."

Junior Leader Naomi Goodin has also developed team building and engaging firefighting and problem-solving exercises that push the Juniors to excel beyond their expected achievement. The Juniors really enjoy the practical exercises, such as draughting water and bowling hoses. Including such activities improves the engagement with Juniors.

In one exercise (see photo below) Juniors wearing a blindfold navigate a hose around obstacles with help from another member who gives them verbal instructions.

"I liked developing a program with my senior brigade members that keeps the Juniors entertained," Naomi said. "By keeping it fun while being safe and informative, we have a functioning program that is encouraging our Juniors to become senior firefighters when they turn 16 years old."

Trafalgar Junior Brigade Captain Matilda Ott explained why she joined the JVDP in 2021.

"I have wanted to be a firefighter since I was little because my dad is involved at Beaconsfield brigade. I think it's cool," she said.

Matilda can't wait to be a senior firefighter and get on the fire truck. "I want to turn out because I want to help my local community."

The senior brigade at Trafalgar has also taken on new recruits including the parents and carers of the Juniors who they met through the JVDP. In addition, seven ex-Junior members have completed General Firefighter training and become senior brigade members, and one has become an operational member at the neighbouring Yarragon Fire Brigade.

Trafalgar brigade genuinely believes that having a JVDP is important for recruitment and community engagement.

"Our young members are important because they shape the way the brigade is going to look in five to 10 years," Mark said. "I believe the sustainability of our brigade is enhanced by the ways we all engage positively with the young people in our community, which is only going to make us and our processes better."

STORY JEN CLEMENT AND MARK WALSHE



Foster brigade member receives life membership

Foster Fire Brigade secretary Paula Crossley has been honoured with a life membership after 42 years of service.

First joining as an 18 year old in 1981, Paula's tenure has predominantly been with Foster Fire Brigade, but she also had a three-year stint with Toora Fire Brigade.

"I tried to join when I was 16 but back then they didn't have women firefighters in CFA," Paula said. "I was really keen to join, so I just had to be patient and wait. Luckily, a member of the brigade was happy to help get me in, and the brigade accepted me really well."

A member ever since, Paula has undertaken many roles since first signing up, including 2nd lieutenant and deputy group officer.

About 15 years ago, Paula had an accident that left her a paraplegic, but despite this she remains an active volunteer with the brigade.

"After the accident, I couldn't go to the station for a while. The brigade members were amazing at backing me up during that time and they've been amazing at supporting me ever since."

When Paula reflects on her time with CFA, she thinks fondly of the bonds made with her peers.

"The camaraderie with the rest of the members really is something special," Paula said. "There's been a lot of really special memories made over the years, both in my brigade and across the wider CFA as a whole."

Paula said she was honoured to receive her life membership.

"I was very surprised. I wasn't expecting it at all as I thought I had a few more years to go before I received it, so it was a very pleasant surprise. Myself and two other members, James McIntyre and Brian Mellor, were presented with our life memberships on the same night, and we were really excited.

"It's very special, because I absolutely love the fire brigade and I really have had a yearning for it since I was quite young. It means a great deal to me, because not only have I enjoyed being in CFA, but I also get recognition for it as well – which will be in the records forever."



PHOTO: KARLI MICHELLE PHOTOGRAPHY

Foster Fire Brigade Captain David Jones said Paula is known around the brigade for her big smile and her enthusiasm.

"She's an absolute inspiration to the brigade and a very worthy recipient of a life membership. Even after her accident, she always had a smile and a positive attitude – she just got on with life," David said.

"Paula really brings something special to the brigade and we're all very lucky to have her."

Paula said her positive attitude helped her after her accident, and she encourages anyone who thinks they may be unable to contribute to CFA to try volunteering and give it a go.

"Just after the accident I was told that anything I want to do can be done – it's just up to me to put my mind to it and I'll get there. That's sort of been my motto ever since the accident.

"I've tried to just keep positive and push on."

STORY TIAHN WRIGHT



Rosebud firefighter heads to the mountain

Twenty-one-year-old Kristin Blight is the epitome of CFA's current recruitment campaign Give us a Hand, proving that whether near or far from home she's willing to jump on the truck when the Victorian community calls.

Following in the footsteps of her dad, Kristin is an enthusiastic Rosebud firefighter who came up through the Boneo Junior ranks.

From June through to September, her CFA volunteerism stretched even further when she headed to Mount Buller for the snow season, and had the opportunity to join the local brigade while working there.

"Shortly after I arrived at Mount Buller for the season, Commander Paul Scragg was doing a walk through our building with the brigade captain, so I thought I'd introduce myself. They invited me to go down to the station for training," Kristin said.

"It was a lot of fun and my brigade back home said to give it a go. It was an amazing experience to work with the people up there - they were so welcoming. I'd definitely recommend it to anyone who is traveling a lot and is still keen to maintain their skills, meet new people and experience something different.

"It was really hard leaving the Mount Buller members. They've already invited me to go back to the brigade when I return to the snow next year."

Across the three months, Kristin was exposed to a stark contrast of incidents compared with Rosebud, and this added strength to her firefighting skills portfolio.

"The main difference was obviously working with snow and ice because I'm so used to responding to incidents in drier conditions or wet days," Kristin said. "Instead of road accidents and house fires, I was responding to apartment alarm calls where I learned a lot about switchboards and the different protectors in buildings.

"The terrain was also very challenging, with a few accidents on the hill and down the winding roads. Some cars would end up on the side of the road in the trees, so we had to navigate that."



Leading from the front as a young CFA volunteer, Kristin was grateful she was able to continue serving the Victorian community while away for work.

"I really enjoy helping the people of our local communities and being their support," she said.

With an eyes-wide-open approach, she encourages new, emerging members to embrace the wisdom of brigade superiors.

"I will always advocate for CFA and the inclusive environment that comes with it, and if you're wanting to join, just go for it.

"Get involved and listen to your superiors around you, especially the older members who've been in the brigade for more than 50 years, because they have a wealth of knowledge and they love sharing it."

Kristin works in hospitality and is heading off to Japan for the upcoming snow season, but she will return towards the end of the Australian summer ready to don her yellows again.

STORY LUCY BISHOP

Trailblazing contribution

Upper Beaconsfield Rural Fire Brigade's Nancy Boura is one of the early pioneers of women firefighting in CFA.

A firefighter from 1981 to the end of 2014, Nancy is believed to have attended more than 1,000 incidents, and she remains an enthusiastic member of the brigade today.

Nancy joined Upper Beaconsfield's Auxiliary in May 1978 after seeing an ad in the local newspaper. At the time she thought she would be feeding firefighters, but little did she know how involved she would become.

She would soon add Communications Officer to her belt, managing the brigade's incoming emergency calls via what was the Fire Reporting Service.

In the 1980s, Upper Beaconsfield, like many other small communities, found itself in the position where many of the brigade's firefighters were forced to find work away from town. This left the brigade with a limited crew to respond to incidents during the day.

At the time, Nancy was working at an apple orchard for then brigade captain Eric Bumpstead. Eric approached Nancy and a number of other women to see if they were interested in bolstering the brigade's ranks. It wasn't widely accepted that women could be firefighters, and the group initially trained in private at Eric's orchard.

They soon gained the necessary skills to turn out to their first fire. Nancy would go on to learn how to drive the brigade's vehicles, successfully gaining her truck licence.

"I came to Australia from England. Volunteering with CFA initially was a way of getting to know people," Nancy said.

"I figured I could join the Auxiliary because I could make sandwiches and take them to the fire front.

"Then it got out hand and I ended up being a radio operator and then one of the first women firefighters in Upper Beaconsfield," she reflects, smiling.

"When you're with a fire brigade you always have a second family and it's a useful way to do something for the community."

The 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires played a huge part in Nancy's life and role as a CFA volunteer. On that day, Nancy was an integral part of a seven-member crew on Upper Beaconsfield's tanker 1 with her son Jon. The crew endured a burn under in Officer and two burn overs in Mount Misery in Beaconsfield and Critchley Parker Jr Reserve in Guys Hill where they were forced to vigorously protect their own lives.

The only woman on board, she calmly reverted to her valuable training. To this day, she believes this training and principles saved their lives. Fellow crews would not

be so fortunate, with 12 firefighters from two other brigades losing their lives in the same fire. The town of Upper Beaconsfield was also completely destroyed.

"We heard on the radio that there was a fire to the north coming our way and decided to turn the trucks out even though the fire wasn't on us at that point," Nancy said.

"By the time we arrived at the station the fire was spotting down Cardinia Creek to Officer.

"From there on we just got busy. We headed down to Officer to start with and then moved back to Mount Misery and then onto Critchley Parker Jr Reserve. We were there when the wind changed.

"It was one long day of one disaster after the other. There were times when the fire caught up with us.

"It's not something you can describe, and I am grateful for the excellent training we had had with our captain."

Across her volunteer career Nancy has received a National Medal, National Emergency Medal and Brigade Life Membership. She was recently honoured with the Women and Firefighting Australasia Outstanding Contribution by a Female Firefighter Award at the 2023 Women and Firefighting Awards.

"Across her more than 45 years of service, Nancy has been a vital part of our brigade," Upper Beaconsfield Captain Ian Pinney said.

"She is still usually one of the first to put her hand up and has been instrumental in raising funds for the upgrade of operational equipment and vehicles.

"She can often be found at the station cleaning up, vacuuming, cutting up rags, setting up chairs in preparation for meetings or weeding our garden beds.

"She may be quietly spoken but when Nancy talks you listen because it is more often than not a very wise head with many years of practical experience talking."

STORY: SHAUNNAGH O'LOUGHLIN AND IAN PINNEY



Nancy with Eric Bumpstead and Stan Hamilton at the brigade's 2023 annual awards.

PHOTO COURTESY OF UPPER BEACONSFIELD FIRE BRIGADE

District 13's specialist rope rescue team

Every callout is different for Monbulk Fire Brigade's steep angle rope team. Called District 13 Rope Rescue Team – which also includes members from Wandin brigade – these highly trained volunteers at times travel up to 150 kilometres away to rescue people from cars, mountains, disused mines and even internal staircases.

"If there's a hill you can drive off or fall off, we've probably been there at some point over the past 20 years," Monbulk Fire Brigade Captain Simon Schroder said.

"We often get called out to a job described as a high-angle rescue, but it might not be what we expect when we arrive. People vary considerably in their ability to judge distances and slopes.

"A rescue needs a team of about eight or nine people, so we rely on Wandin and partner agencies to put a team together. We work and train closely with Alexandra and Marysville SES units."

Monbulk brigade's specialists have been operating since around 2003 and there are currently three high-angle operators and 11 steep-angle rope operators. So what's the difference?

"A steep-angle rescue is anything up to 60 degrees of slope, and a high-angle rescue is between 60 and 90 degrees," Simon explained.

Maintaining and improving rescue skills is obviously crucial for Simon and his team.

"We train in rope rescue about every six weeks while also maintaining skills in our other areas of response – road rescue, wildfire and structures fires.

"We also take part in inter-agency training. For example, Wandin brigade recently sent two members to train with Marysville SES on steep-angle rope scenarios on Lake Mountain in the snow-covered toboggan runs."

Also, three Monbulk brigade members recently qualified as high-angle operators in a joint training course with VICSES.

"The past 12 months have been busy and it's definitely getting busier," Simon said. "We usually average about 25 to 30 calls per year, but we recently carried out seven rescues with ropes in just one month.

"As we're a road accident rescue team, you may think we mostly rescue people from cars, but the majority of our jobs don't involve cars. We help many hikers in Cathedral Range State Park near Buxton, where there are a lot of vertical rock faces. Rescues here are generally prolonged affairs, a long hike in and out carrying the heavy packs of gear. Many of these jobs can be 10 to 12 hours. Occasionally, paramedics have had to camp for the night with patients we've rescued and get airlifted in the morning because of low visibility and night settling in."

Given the terrain, it's virtually impossible to get people out, so the rope rescue team gets them to the top of the cliff or a suitable clearing and a helicopter then takes them to hospital.

"In the past year we've also rescued people in various locations around District 13 including Healesville, Yarra Glen, Gembrook and closer to home at Menzies Creek.



"We've rescued people and dogs who have fallen at quarries and disused mine shafts. We even rescued a man who fell off a tall ladder inside a house. The stairway was very narrow, so we had to carry out a rope rescue."

Being a road accident and steep-angle rescue brigade, they see a lot of trauma that can impact the members.

"We have good access to peer support and most calls also have a roadside debrief where we discuss the issues. It's an opportunity to talk about the incident and how we can do better. Major incidents, which often involve multiple agencies, can have an after-action review."

STORY DUNCAN RUSSELL

Warragul local captures the brigade's 140-year history

When Warragul local Vaughan Fox retired four years ago, his plan was to potter around in his shed, build a boat and learn to weld. But Vaughan, 73, is now a firefighter and the secretary of Warragul Fire Brigade. And to coincide with the 140th anniversary he wrote a book about the brigade.

When the brigade was discussing the anniversary a year ago a conversation came up between Vaughan and Warragul brigade Captain Tyler Hogan (pictured together).

"I had written my family history and I showed the captain. He thought I was the man to write the brigade's history," Vaughan said.

"You have to know your history. The current generation has to know what it was like, how things evolved – to me that's important."

A dinner and awards ceremony was held in August 2023 to celebrate the 140-year milestone.

The brigade formed in 1883 in Queens Street Warragul, and in 1902 the brigade moved to the lower part of Smith Street and then to the top end of Smith Street in 1930. In 2000, the brigade moved to its current home in Gladstone Street.

Today the brigade boasts 65 members (of whom 43 are firefighters) and four trucks including a hazmat vehicle.

Warragul Captain Tyler Hogan said the 140th anniversary was a significant milestone and it was important to collate the brigade's history.

"The history was all starting to get a bit lost, but this book collates it all and we can keep the information centralised," Tyler said.

The book outlines events in chronological order from 1883 to 2023. Vaughan went through old newspapers to piece together the history.

"I transcribed old Trove newspapers from the National Archives for the early history. These told the story as it happened from 1883 up to the 1940s," Vaughan said. "Our local historical society has manual copies of early Gazettes after that and I painstakingly waded through the years for any historical information about the brigade."

"I also relied a lot on past and present senior members, who provided me with their stories and memories of what being a firefighter meant back in the 1980s and onward. The captain also helped by enthusiastically researching the brigade's sporting history to provide a backdrop for some of the trophies and the many certificates awarded since 1896."

The book contains information about some significant items including an old bell that dates back to 17 February 1893 which was forged by the Country Fire Brigades Board. The bell is now symbolic and hangs on a specially-made timber frame outside the station.

There is also a letter that the brigade founding captain wrote to the council in 1883, requesting water be provided to the township and that a fire brigade be inaugurated. This was approved on 13 August 1883. The Warragul and District Historical Society has the original letter, and a copy has now been framed and hangs in the station.

To order a copy of the Warragul Fire Brigade book, called *Always Ready – The story of the Warragul Fire Brigade 1883-2023* contact the brigade.

STORY BRIGID ENNIS





Community engagement forum shares ideas

More than 120 volunteers from 112 brigades across the state gathered at San Remo to develop their brigade community engagement risk-based plan.

The Community Engagement State Forum occurs every two years and builds the community engagement capability of our volunteers, particularly the brigade community safety coordinator (BCSC) role, by providing practical activities to support them in their brigade.

The weekend was filled with lots of discussion, workshopping and presentations from experts. There were also some practical examples from brigade members who have had success with their approach and were happy to share their tips.

Brigades from all corners of the state attended including Portland, Apsley, Red Cliffs, Harrierville and Mallacoota, so the event was a great opportunity to network and share ideas.

The forum focused on supporting and developing the BCSC role, which includes developing a brigade community engagement risk-based plan. This looks at local risk and community needs and focuses on those at higher risk.

The forum guided BCSCs through an interactive workshop over two days where they built their plan. At the end of the weekend participants took their plan back to their brigades for implementation.

Members were taken through the key steps to develop their plan including what risk tools are available for brigades and looking through data from their own brigade area. Victorian Fire Risk Register maps show bushfire risk, and dashboards give statistics about residential fires in their area. Each participant was given a pack containing data and maps specific to their brigade.

Kate Wisewould and Nicole Mapleback from Tyers Fire Brigade delivered a presentation about their journey over the past six years and how they used social media to build their brigade's profile and engage the community. They spoke about how it was challenging at first as they tried to get buy-in from all brigade members. However, over time everyone started to see the benefits and it brought new members to the brigade. They also

have a very good presence in their local community and take every opportunity to engage residents.

Longford Fire Brigade CSC Harold Bulman said he learned more about the community engagement plan, the structure of it and how it fits together. He also gained a lot of great ideas from others about how to improve community engagement in his brigade.

"I'm going to take small steps. We don't have to do it all at once," Harold said. "It's also about taking your own brigade on the journey and building relationships in the local community.

"I'm going to get all our members out and about, checking all of our little back tracks and water points and chatting to locals while we are out there. It doesn't need to be complicated."

When Harold returned from the forum he quickly got to work on finalising his plan and sharing it with his brigade. He has also booked the Mobile Education Unit so he can engage people at the local service station.

"Friday afternoons are best because we have all the local ESSO gas plant workers dropping in for fuel and snacks after work."

Michelle Turnham from Ararat Fire Brigade said the information from the weekend had already had a positive outcome for her brigade.

"We installed the first of hopefully several smoke alarms for a vulnerable resident in our town," Michelle said. "I received help from our district office, our CEC, and some like-minded members in my brigade. I also learned a lot at the forum."

For more information about developing your brigade community engagement plan visit the CFA Community Engagement Content Portal (cfa.vic.gov.au/cecontentportal) or complete the elearning module on the Learning Hub (learninghub.cfa.vic.gov.au) called 'Risk-based Community Engagement Planning'.

You can also reach out to your BASO or your District Community Engagement Coordinator for support.

STORY ELLISA BOURNE

Keeping our heritage safe

Cultural landmarks, artefacts and other evidence made over thousands of years of continual occupation by Victoria's Indigenous communities are irreplaceable and protected by law.

CFA actively encourages a proactive approach to protect heritage values, whether they are of Indigenous or non-Indigenous (historic) heritage:

- We include cultural heritage values advisers in incident management teams (IMT).
- We include cultural heritage awareness information in the annual regional pre-season IMT briefings.
- Joint fuel management plans in our vegetation management program include thorough heritage values assessments for each treatment.

The annual program of vegetation management activities across Victoria includes a range of different treatments. Fuel reduction burning along roadsides, some reserves and private land is the main method of fuel management we undertake, usually in spring or autumn. Increasingly, we support Traditional Owner groups to carry out cultural burning, which can also help reduce local fire risk.

Other methods we use to reduce fire risk include burning and non-burning (or biological) treatments such as mulching or slashing of weedy vegetation, and sometimes grazing animals to remove and lower grassy fuels.

Each treatment option has a different level of risk to identified heritage values present

within the landscape. To reduce potential damage to any known or recorded values at a site, whether Indigenous or historic origin, steps are taken to identify and protect those identified values.

CFA's cultural heritage adviser reviews every fuel treatment nominated in the Joint Fuel Management program to identify any recorded Indigenous or historic heritage values. If a recorded value does exist, a suitable way is found to protect the value identified.

Heritage values vary greatly, from the conspicuous and obvious to the indiscernible and intangible. The identified value may be a living or dead tree with a shield, coolamon or canoe tree, or even climbing toe holds cut to make possum hunting easier. Or it could be a large, fire-hollowed veteran tree.

"In CFA, as in emergency services more broadly, we do our best to make sure our people on the ground have the best information at hand," Cultural Heritage Adviser Michael Sherwen (pictured) said. "But we always ask our people in the field to keep their eyes open to the possibility of new finds. For example, after the 2020 Budj Bim fires near Heywood, the leaf litter layer was burnt off and revealed previously unknown ancient stone eel traps and stone house sites.

"Another example was at Ruffly after a wildfire. During site rehabilitation works CFA members noticed grooves in rocks. Later inspections by Traditional Owners confirmed they were previously unknown axe-grinding grooves, and nearby



they found birthing trees and other artefacts. More of our heritage is always being revealed."

Certain areas are known to hold burial mounds, ceremonial sites (such as Corroboree rings), stone formations or birthing sites. You may also find axe heads (see the main photo of an axe head in situ).

Areas where flood plains occur in riverine environments, such as along our major river systems including associated wetlands and billabongs, are likely to have numerous cooking mounds throughout.

In the Budj Bim World Heritage Landscape in south-west Victoria, an entire landscape is identified as having "living cultural connection".

The recognised value may also relate to the heritage gates of a parkland reserve, historic bridges, or an Avenue of Honour viewed as a local or regional landmark and icon.

Ways to protect a particular value will depend on the physical nature of the identified value, the fuel types and the proposed fuel treatment. Mitigation measures are developed in consultation with the person who has nominated the treatment, usually the district's vegetation management officer, and may be as simple as excluding a section from treatment if there is a need to do so.

Victoria's heritage belongs to all of us, just as it belongs to generations who will come after us. It is our obligation to carry out our activities ensuring the legacies of heritage left to us are safe-guarded.

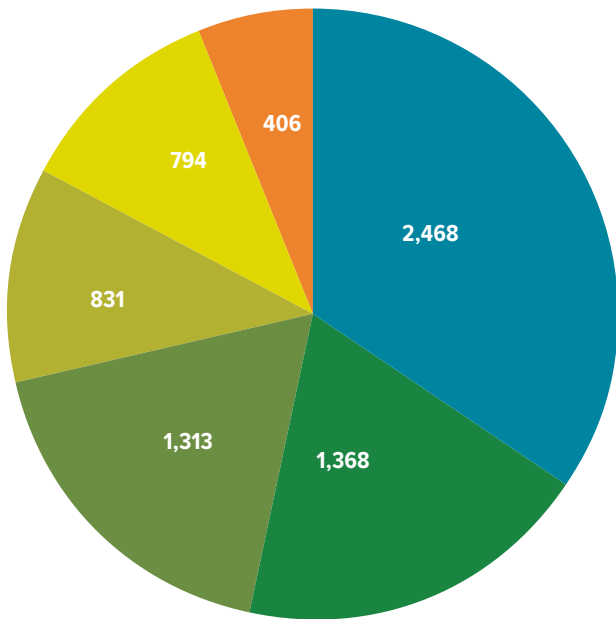
STORY ANDREW GOVANSTONE



Incident statistics

1 July 2023 – 30 September 2023

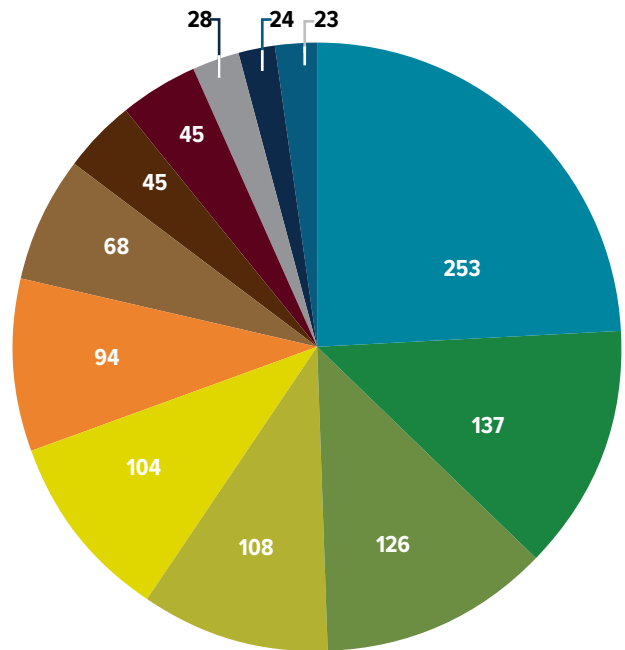
INCIDENTS BY TYPE



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

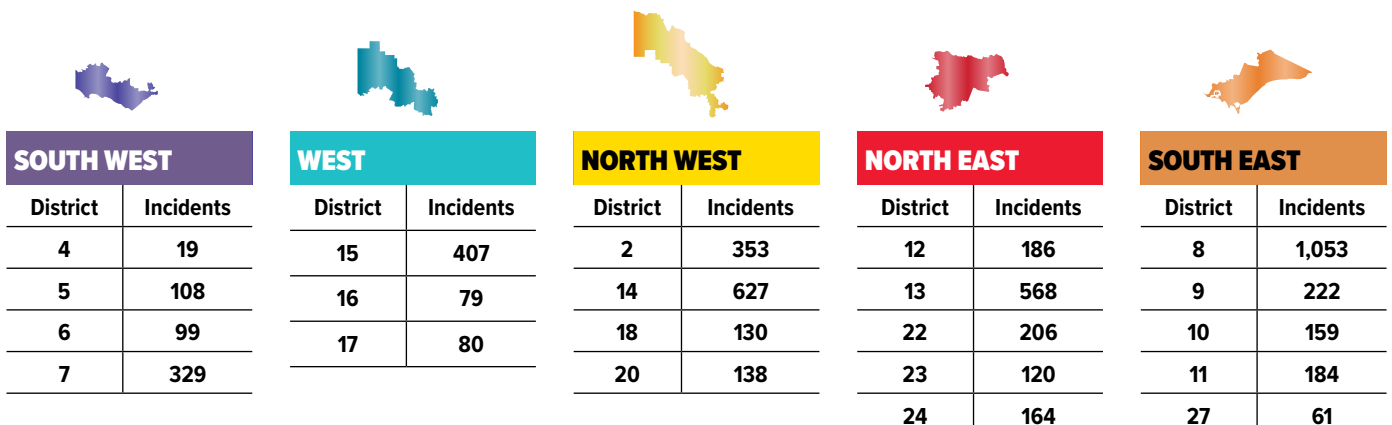
* Includes 2,127 callouts supporting FRV

ORIGIN OF FIRE



Paddock/open area/lawn	
Undetermined	
Scrub/bush area	
Road/car park	
Engine area/running gear/vehicle wheel	
Kitchen/cooking area	
Rubbish area/rubbish bin	
Chimney/flue	
Garage/carport	
Balcony/verandah	
Bedroom	
Lounge	

INCIDENTS BY DISTRICT





• BUNINYONG.



• EAGLEHAWK.



• KANGAROO FLAT.





From left to right:
 Brigade members c1900
 1935 Dodge Sinclair
 Learmonth St station,
 c1910
 Merryweather manual
 pump, 1899



From left to right:
 Early fire station and crew
 Deluge manual pump
 1930 DA Dodge,
 Shand Mason ladder,
 1925 Graham
 Eaglehawk Fire Station
 with vehicles, c1980



From left to right:
 Running team, c1890
 Front-mounted
 International
 pumper, c1980s
 R series Bedford
 tanker, c1982
 Fire station,
 Station St, 1993

Emergency Memberlink

The Emergency Memberlink program is a way for us to recognise your commitment and contribution to emergency services and Victorian communities.

By using Emergency Memberlink, you can receive discounts and benefits on a wide range of products and services in Victoria and interstate.

Details of the offers and full terms and conditions are at emergencymemberlink.com.au.

To join Memberlink phone 1800 820 037 or register online at emergencymemberlink.com.au. You can also access your Memberlink card on the website.

The Memberlink team welcomes feedback about the program and your suggestions about benefits you think would be of value to you, your family and your colleagues. Phone the team or leave a message on the Emergency Memberlink Facebook page.



- The **Bridgestone Business Associates Program** offers 15% off Bridgestone's website prices on the full range of car and light van tyres.
- Members have access to free membership to **ubookdirect's** worldwide Travel Club.
- **Westfund Health Insurance** offers a 5% discount and two-month waiting periods waived on extras cover.
- Members get a \$300 reduction in their excess when repairing their car at **Sheen Panel Service**.
- Members have access to exclusive pricing on all new vehicles and accessories at **Eastern Subaru**.
- **Experience Oz** offers at least 10% off deals on attractions, zoos and aquariums, Queensland theme parks and extreme activities.
- Discounts on home entertainment, audio, televisions, mobile phones, IT hardware, fitness trackers and whitegoods through the **JB Hi-Fi Corporate Benefits Programme**.
- Savings when you join the **Qantas Club** via the Member Benefits Pty Ltd Corporate Scheme. Contact your Emergency Memberlink team for more information.
- You and your family have access to discounts at **Specsavers Optometrists**.
- **Sixt Australia** offers up to 20% off the best rate of the day on passenger and commercial vehicles.
- 15% off the best available rate at **Best Western** Australian and New Zealand properties.
- **Device Deal**, in collaboration with **Arlo** and Emergency Memberlink, offers up to 30% discount on Arlo wire-free security cameras and products.
- Up to 15% off the best daily car rental rate with **Europcar**.
- Save 3% to 7% on pre-purchased **Gift Cards** including Woolworths, WISH, Coles, Myer, Kmart, Target, Rebel Sport, JB Hi-Fi, Supercheap Auto, BCF and The Good Guys.
- Special hotel accommodation rates throughout Australia and internationally with **Hotel Planner**.
- Commercial pricing on household appliances and electronics through **The Good Guys Commercial Division**.
- 15% off prescription glasses and prescription sunglasses at **OPSM**.
- 25% off Revitalise Bath House bathing and Moonlit bathing during off-peak periods (Mon-Fri outside of public and school holidays) at **Peninsula Hot Springs** on the Mornington Peninsula.
- **mycar Tyre & Auto** offers 10% off servicing, mechanical repairs and TCP tyre purchases.
- Corporate rates at **Hotel Windsor**.
- Discounted cinema tickets, attraction tickets and e-gift cards through the **Memberlink Box Office**.
- **RSEA Safety** offers 15% off full-priced items in store.
- Special offers on **Elgas** LPG bottled gas.
- Save 5% on adult Spirit and Flexi passenger fares on **Spirit of Tasmania**.
- Nissan Fleet pricing and other benefits across a select range of new Nissan vehicles.
- 5% to 10% off the best unrestricted rate of the day at **Accor Hotels**.
- Plants, trees and garden products at true wholesale prices at **Plantmark**.
- **Searoad Ferries** offers 10% discount on ferry travel between Sorrento and Queenscliff.
- 20% discount on unlimited ride tickets at **Luna Park Melbourne**.
- Exclusive pricing on whitegoods, kitchen appliances, audio visual, computers and mobile phones, home appliances and furniture through **Harvey Norman Groups & Associations Division**. Contact your Emergency Memberlink Team to arrange a quote.
- Corporate leisure rates and reduced insurance excess on car hire with **Avis**.
- Preferred customer savings rate on accommodation at **Choice Hotels Asia-Pac** across Australia.
- Free small soft drink, small orange juice or small McCafé coffee with any purchase over \$4 at **McDonald's** restaurants.
- Up to 20% discount on the public web price on the entire range of **Lenovo** notebook and desktop PCs, monitors and accessories.
- Take a further \$50 off the already discounted price on a **Driver Dynamics** Defensive Driving Course.
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Brigade

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