

# Brigade

OUR COMMUNITY • OUR CFA



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

**Grampians hit hard for second time in a year**



**How we train our fire investigators**



**Staff who are also devoted volunteers**

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

**Manager Member Communication and Engagement:** Brad Thomas

**Editor:** Duncan Russell  
duncan.russell@cfa.vic.gov.au  
0428 907 053

**Graphic designer:** Mark Hammond

**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.

CFA encourages the dissemination and re-use of information in this publication. The State of Victoria owns the copyright of all material produced by CFA.

All material in this publication is provided under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 international licence with the exception of any images, photographs or branding, including CFA and government logos. In some cases a third party may hold copyright in material in this publication and their permission may be required to use the material. See [creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0).

Material obtained from this publication is to be attributed as: © State of Victoria (Country Fire Authority) 2025



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

### Useful resources

**Brigade** [cfa.vic.gov.au/brigademag](https://cfa.vic.gov.au/brigademag)

 [news.cfa.vic.gov.au](https://news.cfa.vic.gov.au)

 [facebook.com/cfavic](https://facebook.com/cfavic)

 [x.com/cfa\\_updates](https://x.com/cfa_updates) (Twitter)

CFA intranet:  
[members.cfa.vic.gov.au](https://members.cfa.vic.gov.au)

Free CFA images for download:  
[digitallibrary.cfa.vic.gov.au](https://digitallibrary.cfa.vic.gov.au)

Community engagement material:  
[cfa.vic.gov.au/cecontentportal](https://cfa.vic.gov.au/cecontentportal)

CFA templates for download:  
[cfa.vic.gov.au/templatetoolkit](https://cfa.vic.gov.au/templatetoolkit)



COVER PHOTO: GEORGIA WILES



PHOTO: ROSS WALKER



Autumn 2025

# IN THIS ISSUE

- 04** News from our leaders
- 06** **Feature:** CFA staff who are also volunteers
- 08** The Grampians are hit hard again by fires
- 10** CFA Regulations review
- 11** Update on CFA projects
- 12** **Feature:** Training our bushfire investigators
- 14** A new way to teach fire safety to children
- 15** Echuca teen steps up in NSW
- 16** Six CFA members receive AFSMs
- 18** New strike team leader training launched
- 19** Quarterly Operational Update
- 24** Case studies
- 28** Interstate deployment leads to long-lasting friendship
- 29** Developing inclusivity
- 29** Deputy Chief Officer tackles off-road course
- 30** A chance encounter 40 years later
- 31** Fires caused by escapes and reignitions from burn-offs
- 32** **Feature:** The benefits of Fire Equipment Maintenance
- 34** Faces of CFA
- 35** Developing a brigade's standards
- 36** Community safety in the alps
- 37** CFA's new website for Junior members
- 38** Triple benefit from roadside burn
- 39** A slice of history at Buninyong
- 39** CALD resources and how to engage diverse communities
- 40** How MEUs are used in the community
- 40** The health impacts of smoke
- 41** Incident statistics
- 42** Through the ages: Portarlington



## CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

# Greg Leach AFSM

**On 2 April this year, CFA recognises our 80th anniversary, which includes a keepsake edition included with this issue of Brigade magazine. I am very proud of this organisation and our rich history in serving the people of Victoria, and there will be many moments to reflect upon our achievements across various CFA platforms.**



In the first few months in my role, I have enjoyed touching base with many volunteers and staff across the organisation as well as key stakeholders to get an appreciation of the current state of CFA.

However, the constant fire activity since December has limited my travels. I expect to be getting around the state in coming weeks, weather permitting.

Our members have worked tirelessly, particularly in the west of the state, as fires have continued to burn in the Grampians and Little Desert National Parks. I thank each and every member who has committed time and energy to fight these fires, particularly those who sacrificed family time over the Christmas and New Year period.

In November I was in District 16, where I visited staff and local brigades, as well as attending the CFA Board meeting. I have also had the opportunity to spend time in District 15.

One of the highlights since I've been in the role was the opportunity to attend the Rotary Emergency Services Community Awards in Canberra. I was proud to be present when CFA member Garry Luxford, from Tooradin Fire Brigade, was named the national winner. Garry followed in the footsteps of his parents in joining CFA and was recognised for his outstanding community service which embodied the awards motto of 'Service above self'.

I've been able to attend forums for the Women's and Young Adults Advisory committees and attended the Australia Day reception at Government House. We also welcomed Minister for Emergency Services Vicki Ward to our offices at Burwood East in February 2025.

Importantly, I've already been able to meet with key partners, including attending the December meeting of Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria State Council, and meeting with sector partners including Emergency Management Victoria, the Emergency Management Commissioner, VICSES, Fire Rescue Victoria, Life Saving Victoria, Triple Zero Victoria and the Community Safety Building Authority.

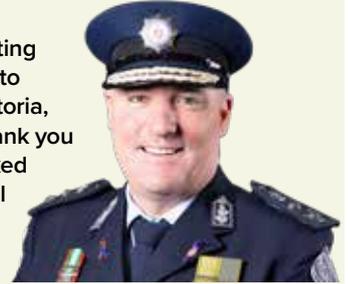
Subject to operations, I have trips scheduled to each region in coming months, including North East Region in early April and South West Region in early May.

I look forward to catching up with members and hearing about their experiences and ideas about how we can continue to make CFA a great place to volunteer and work.

## CHIEF OFFICER

# Jason Heffernan

**After 54 long days of firefighting efforts over Christmas and into February across western Victoria, I want to extend a sincere thank you to all our members who worked tirelessly to protect their local communities this summer.**



As Victorians, we are no stranger to fire, but that does not diminish the dedication our CFA members give every bushfire season right across the state.

While the fire season is far from over, I am incredibly proud of the tremendous amount of work our crews on the ground, in the air and in the control centres have accomplished to contain the Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park and Little Desert National Park fires, while also continuing to respond to local callouts.

Since the start of the first Grampians fire, thousands of you sacrificed your time with family and friends while battling major fires across the state. Your willingness to assist and drop everything in times of need is highly appreciated and respected. I want to assure you it has not gone unnoticed.

My thanks extend to the many partner agencies across the sector who contributed crucial resources and respite to our crews, and to the additional support we received from our interstate colleagues.

We were faced with a challenging fire threat in an area that was already devastated by fires last year and the readiness and response was admirable, and a true testament to the preparation, research and community engagement we worked hard on throughout the year.

I was honoured to attend Pomonal Fire Brigade's annual community Australia Day breakfast and awards presentation, where I proudly presented a Special Recognition Award to brigade members to acknowledge their outstanding service throughout the February 2024 fire. The local members conducted themselves with great professionalism and demonstrated complete selflessness. I was also thrilled to present a Chief Officer's Commendation to Ararat Group Officer David Coad and Ararat Deputy Group Officer Matt Venn for their impressive actions and supportive leadership throughout this time.

I would also like to congratulate the six highly regarded CFA members who were named as this year's Australian Fire Service Medal recipients to recognise their outstanding service to CFA and their communities.

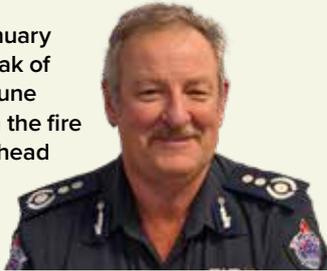
The recent fires in the west of the state have reflected the predictions in AFAC's Summer Seasonal Bushfire Outlook, and our observations of the underlying dryness, fuel load and lack of rainfall in these regions remain a concern. We are ready to respond over coming weeks, but we know fire safety is a shared responsibility so community engagement and education will continue to play a large role.

I encourage our members to be mindful of their health and wellbeing, and stress the importance of looking after yourselves, rest when you can and take care of each other. Thank you and stay safe.

## DCO NORTH WEST REGION

# Bill Johnstone AFSM

At the time of writing in January we are approaching the peak of summer, and it's an opportune moment for us to reflect on the fire season so far, as we look ahead to the coming months, and acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of our staff and volunteers.



This season, North West Region has already faced its share of fire activity. From grassfires to bushfires, each incident has tested our resilience and operational capacity.

While the early months of the season were marked by milder conditions, recent periods of high temperatures and strong winds have escalated the fire risk significantly. Our teams have responded to numerous incidents and supported the fire suppression efforts in the Grampians, and the ability of our crews to act swiftly proved critical in protecting lives and property. Partnerships with landowners, local government and other emergency services further strengthened our preparedness and response.

One notable regional incident occurred on 20 December 2024, when a fire broke out near Coffey Road, Bullengarook. Despite challenging conditions, including steep terrain and strong winds, firefighters worked tirelessly to contain the blaze. Through coordinated ground and aerial operations, crews brought the fire under control within a week. The dedication of all on the frontline and those who supported response activities over the holiday period not only protected lives and property, but also minimised environmental damage in the area.

The community's resilience, combined with the unwavering commitment of emergency services, exemplifies the strength and solidarity that's essential when facing such natural disasters.

Looking ahead, Victoria's weather outlook indicates warmer-than-average temperatures, with variable rainfall patterns across the state. This combination may elevate fire risks, particularly in drier areas, emphasising the importance of vigilance and proactive preparedness.

Managing fatigue remains one of our critical challenges during this demanding period. Responding to emergencies is physically and mentally taxing, and it's vital to prioritise rest and recovery. Taking care of yourself and your team not only benefits individual wellbeing, but also ensures we can continue to support our communities.

Finally, I want to express my deepest gratitude to all CFA members, both staff and volunteers, for your dedication. Whether on the fireground, in ICCs, or supporting behind the scenes, your contributions are invaluable. Many of you balance these responsibilities with family, work, and other commitments, yet you continue to step up when our communities need you most.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to protecting lives and property. Let us continue to work together, stay safe, and support one another.

## GROUP OFFICER, D17

# Justin Batson

Goroke Group is in the West Wimmera, bordering the southern edge of The Little Desert. January and early February were particularly challenging because of two large fires caused by dry lightning. The southern edge of the fire front in The Little Desert stretched for 35 kilometres, significantly impacting farmers, homes, livestock and scrub land. Goroke was evacuated during the night.



The fire was brought under control only five kilometres from the town. The tireless efforts of all firefighters during this crisis – whether on trucks, private units, aircraft, West Wimmera Shire Council, bulldozer operators, Victoria Police, and emergency services – have been nothing short of heroic. Their dedication in safeguarding our town and farms was greatly appreciated.

In mid-February, brigade members attended a school and community barbecue, where both the local school and kindergarten students presented volunteers with a cake, a handmade poster and heartfelt cards to express gratitude for all who protected our community.

Goroke Group consists of six brigades, one of which is transitioning into a satellite station. This significant shift required extensive planning for both the group and the staff in Horsham, and I'm pleased to report that the transition was successful. One key benefit is that the change ensures a truck remains operational in the area, which is an important outcome. We are among the first to implement such a change, though sadly, we will not be the last. The combination of a declining rural population and the increasing size of farms and machinery means fewer people are needed to maintain operations, which poses ongoing challenges attracting CFA members.

I'm committed to making a meaningful impact on our community, fostering new connections, and encouraging the next generation to join and remain involved with CFA, regardless of whether they stay in the area. CFA runs in my veins. Like any profession, it has its challenges, but it also provides immeasurable rewards. I have participated in enough callouts to have grown both professionally and personally. However, the most difficult aspect of emergency services is not the act of witnessing loss, but the reality of knowing that a life has been lost – that is the hardest truth to confront.

Looking to the future, it's vital we continue to support our volunteers, who selflessly put their lives on hold to serve. We're fortunate to have a strong network supporting CFA, including DEECA and our invaluable aerial firefighting fleet. As technology continues to evolve, the investments made in tools such as GPS tracking and radios have proven invaluable, and it's crucial the government continues to support CFA, especially in rural areas, by investing in infrastructure and resources.

Above all, our primary goal is to respond swiftly, perform our duties to the highest standard, and return home safely to our families, friends and loved ones.

# STAFF WHO ARE VOLUNTEERS TOO

Whether they become staff members first then join a brigade, or vice versa, these dedicated CFA members live and breathe CFA – and love it

Stories by CFA Media Team



## Tegan Kearney, South West Region

Tegan Kearney can be found tackling spreadsheets and helping managers and executives manage their budgets in her day job at CFA as the Senior Finance Business Partner in the Financial Planning and Analysis Team. But her work with CFA extends beyond the dollars and cents.

As a volunteer for Grovedale Fire Brigade in Geelong, Tegan doesn't hesitate to roll up her sleeves and help her local community.

After getting a job at CFA in 2019 shortly before the Black Summer fires, Tegan said she was overwhelmed with the camaraderie she saw in CFA, even from people working from a desk.

"It was like nothing I had ever experienced in my career before, having come from a banking background," Tegan said.

"Everyone was focused on the fires no matter what their role. They put aside their usual tasks and turned their attention to how they could help.

"Whether it was working in an incident management team in a finance or logistics capacity, backfilling someone else with specific skills so they could be freed up to help, driving people or resources to where they need to be, everyone just did what they could."

Seeing how well everyone worked together towards a common goal encouraged Tegan to think about how she could contribute even more and that led her to knock on the door of Grovedale Fire Brigade. Being a volunteer in the same location as your work is a unique experience, but Tegan said it is one she loves.

"My roles are completely different but they both ultimately work towards the same outcome of supporting CFA to protect lives and property," Tegan said.

Tegan is grateful CFA encourages her passion for volunteering as well as working.

"My work colleagues are really good and understanding of my role as a volunteer. They support me to attend callouts or deployments wherever possible."

Tegan said she loved CFA and felt lucky to be able to work and volunteer with such an organisation.

"CFA is an organisation you can be proud to be a part of, whether you are working at HQ, supporting the brigades on the ground or jumping on a truck," Tegan said. "It's all important work and it's a good feeling knowing you are contributing to that."



## Lukasz Lipnicki, South East Region

With CFA volunteers at the heart of what he does as both a firefighter and staff member, Lukasz Lipnicki well and truly embodies the spirit of CFA and community service.

Working as a regional brigade administrative support officer for the past five years, Lukasz coordinates volunteer sustainability projects in the region, such as the District 9 and District 27 Women's Network, Women's Challenge Camp, and Diversity and Inclusion Working Group.

On the other side of the hose, Lukasz reflects fondly on his near four years as a Cockatoo Fire Brigade member, particularly enjoying the regular contact he gets with volunteers as it reminds him of why they do the work they do.

"Overall, being a CFA volunteer is fun. I enjoy the camaraderie of the brigade, the nature of the work, the callouts and more broadly being a part of our organization for our community," Lukasz said.

"I'm currently the brigade's health and safety officer. My job has helped me understand the dynamics and the nuances of how CFA systems and processes work.

"Every day I travel across the south-east interacting with members in district 9, 10 or 27, even as far out as 11. Having the language and understanding of what firefighters face on the ground is invaluable.

"Having completed the General Firefighter course and attended incidents, working alongside other emergency services and being deployed to major fires has allowed for relatable conversations and the opportunity to build rapport."

Lukasz said whether they are rolling out region-wide strategies, delivering supplies, or considering where to park when visiting stations, they are mindful of making each other's lives a little easier.

"Our staff and volunteers lead busy lives and give CFA so much while asking for so little," Lukasz said. "I think it's important that, wherever we can, we all consider how best to support each other in the decisions we make."

Given Lukasz's nature to assist in times of need, when Cockatoo was hit by a severe storm in February 2024, he was able to lend a hand to his brigade members behind the scenes.

"I decided to head to IGA to grab a few roast chooks, bread rolls, and a slab of soft drink for when they came back to refuel and swap crews," Lukasz said. "Pulling up to a hot meal and something to drink brought a lot of smiles out."



## Tanya Lumley, North East Region

Seeing her dad volunteering with CFA during the Ash Wednesday fires started a long-lasting love of CFA within Tanya. She is a member of Strathbogie brigade and works in the Volunteer Sustainability Team (VST).

Originally a volunteer with Boneo brigade, Tanya recently transferred to Strathbogie brigade, where she said she is incredibly lucky to have an amazing mentor.

“I was sad to leave an awesome brigade, and joining a new brigade felt a little like starting again,” Tanya said. “But seeing my new team in action on the fireground and how willing they were to share their skills and knowledge, made me happy about my new brigade home.”

Tanya said she loved both her VST role and being a volunteer at CFA and she was lucky the roles complemented each other.

“Although I’m only new to the role in VST, I can see that it allows for a great understanding of the diverse experiences and needs of brigades and volunteers,” she said.

“On the other hand, learning from the experienced and skilled members of my brigade equips me with valuable knowledge that I can take to my day job. Working on projects that help to empower brigades, having experienced what it’s like in a brigade, is incredibly rewarding. It’s a bit of a symbiotic experience.”

Tanya has a strong connection to the community and she’s happy that CFA embodies this value and gives her a place where she can uphold it in both her personal and professional life.

“Being a member of a CFA brigade embodies community for me – a bunch of people working together to do good. At my brigade and office I’m surrounded by dedicated people who are passionate about making a difference. That’s such a wonderful place to be.”

Tanya said balancing work and volunteering for her is no different from all the other volunteers who give up their time.

“Just like all members who have a job and volunteer for CFA, we do what we can and what we have time for. We all have families and hobbies and interests outside of these roles and they’re just as valuable and important,” she said.

Despite being a new staff member, Tanya said she was already feeling good about taking her passion for CFA and making it her day job, and she’s pleased to be working with fantastic people.

## Will Hodgson, West Region

In 1991, 14-year-old Will Hodgson boarded a bus home from Fiskville after a CFA training session, unaware that over the next 34 years the organisation would become a central part of his life. What began as a way to help his community following the Warrandyte bushfires that year has grown into a lifelong commitment to fire and emergency services.

“During the fires in ’91, I remember feeling helpless watching the helicopters and fire trucks as smoke filled the air. I made a phone call to North Warrandyte brigade and haven’t looked back since,” Will recalled.

“I’ve been turning out since I was 14 years of age – the rules were a bit different back then.”

Will’s volunteer CFA journey has been marked by steady progression.

“I spent more than 16 years at North Warrandyte, then transferred to Christmas Hills and then onto Warrandyte, moving through the officer ranks in all three brigades.”

His professional career with CFA began in 2008 as a pad operator at Bangholme training ground working on volunteer and promotional courses. Over the years, he has taken on numerous roles, including working on the Road Crash Rescue Support Project.

Today, Will is the captain of Warrandyte brigade and a full-time employee with Fire Rescue Victoria seconded to CFA as the pad supervisor at Central Highlands training ground in Ballan.

“Balancing the dual roles has its challenges, but ultimately it’s been rewarding,” he said. “The bonus of playing in both worlds is gaining a holistic understanding of what the organisation is trying to achieve. I’ve also become a bit of a conduit for other volunteers looking for guidance.”

Will has been deployed to some of Victoria’s most significant incidents and travelled interstate.

Reflecting on his journey, Will said, “I didn’t think this would be a career path, but CFA showed me you can learn new skills and be given opportunities. I was lucky enough to turn a hobby into a career and a passion.

“I’d never have dreamed that the 14-year-old on a bus to Fiskville would one day be responsible for a CFA training facility. Set yourself a dream; you never know what’s possible.”



# Grampians hit hard again

PHOTO: ROSS WALKER

**Four homes in Moyston and Mafeking were destroyed by bushfire in western Victoria as a fire in the Grampians National Park that started in December burned more than 76,000 hectares. In addition, 40 outbuildings in Moyston, Willaura, Willaura North, Mafeking, Pomonal, Mirranatwa and Glenthompson were lost.**

Dry lightning started a fire in the Grampians on 16 December 2024. Initially, it burned in remote and inaccessible areas but as it grew rapidly over several days multiple Emergency Warnings were issued and residents in many townships were advised to evacuate.

There was a Total Fire Ban for the whole of Victoria on 26 December with Extreme Fire Danger Ratings and temperatures in the mid-40s in large parts of the state. Strong winds of 70 to 80km/h gusting to 100km/h in elevated areas were also forecast, ahead of a westerly wind change later that day and into Friday morning.

On Boxing Day, CFA crews and Forest Fire Management Victoria dealt with a challenging fire threat in an area already devastated by fires earlier this year. Dozens of strike teams were deployed to the Grampians and there were 1,300 CFA firefighters on the ground. Many hundreds of other CFA members gave up their Christmas and Boxing Day commitments with family and friends to work in incident control centres.

CFA was grateful for the support from our interstate colleagues in New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and the ACT which provided some welcome respite for local crews.

## Strike teams deployed

The response to this fire included the deployment of CFA's first ultra heavy tanker strike team from District 18, providing much-needed heavy duty capability on the fireground. Strike teams were also mobilised from Districts 20, 2, 7 and 6 into strategic locations in the west and south-west to cover local resources.

Scoresby Fire Brigade Firefighter Ross Walker, who joined Strike Team 1304 (pictured top right) on Boxing Day, sacrificed holiday time with his family to travel to the Grampians. When he arrived, he was immediately deployed on a night shift.

"The first night was full on," Ross said. "We left Moyston Fire Station and drove to Pomonal just off Long Gully Road where we were asked to protect houses. It was a very dynamic situation. One moment we were driving in complete darkness and the next moment we were surrounded by fire and we had to drive through it."

Ross's crew waited for a dozer to run a control line and then they protected several houses.

"The wind was crazy. Really strong. We saw a running grassfire caused by embers and we jumped on it and put it out."

Finding water to fill up the tanker was a challenge, but a local resident allowed some trucks to fill up from his dam.

After an uncomfortably hot day trying to sleep, Ross's second night was much calmer.

"We blacked out an area where the fire had come through and we drove round to make sure there were no active fires. We also recorded the position of dangerous trees so that they could be made safe.

"I've been to South Australia, NSW and all over Victoria on strike teams," Ross said. "Seeing people who have lost homes puts things into perspective.

"If I'd been asked to go to the Grampians on Christmas Day I would have gone. It would have been hard as I have a young family, but I would have done it. As a CFA volunteer, it's about people needing you more than anyone else in your life. I have a supportive wife who is happy for me to help others.

"I want to help people during their most trying and difficult times and do something that makes a difference."

By 30 December, the fire had impacted more than 76,000 hectares and was still not yet under control. Three Watch and Act warnings were in place: the Long Gully Road to College Road area, east of Mt William; the eastern side of the Grampians National Park from Moyston to Bornes Hill (including Mafeking, Watgania and Maroona); and for Halls Gap and Pomonal.

Lower temperatures in subsequent days allowed firefighters to conduct burning operations in the north-east of the Grampians. The fire was declared contained on 6 January 2025 and under control on 13 January. The fire footprint circumference was 422 kilometres at the time of writing.

Moyston Fire Brigade Captain Alistair Mason was full of praise and gratitude for the help the local brigades received.

“On behalf of Moyston brigade and the Moyston community, I would like to extend our thanks to all the CFA brigades, FFMVic, aircraft and other support agencies that came to assist,” Alistair said.

“Extraordinary work was done by the District 18 strike team of ultra heavy tankers on Boxing Day around the Barton Station area of Moyston. Their work in stopping the fire as it ran out of the national park in an easterly direction was instrumental in saving the Moyston township from being impacted by the fire.”

### More fires on 27 January

Lightning strikes on 27 January caused two new fires in the Grampians and also at Little Desert National Park.

The Grampians fires merged with the original Yarram Gap Road fire from 17 December 2024 as a result of ongoing fire activity and back-burning. The Wallaby Rocks section of the fire was contained on 8 February after more than 59,000 hectares had been burnt.

The Little Desert fire spread quickly within the first couple of days and in total burned more than 95,000 hectares. One property and one business were destroyed.

Several Emergency Warnings were issued for these later fires and communities were urged to leave.



Chief Officer Jason Heffernan was full of praise for the hundreds of people who brought these fires under control.

“In the various incident and district control centres and on the fireground, great work was done to contain the Grampians and Little Desert fires, where hundreds of personnel worked in shifts around the clock,” Jason said.

“When I toured the fireground in the Little Desert complex, it was clear just how dry the terrain was. Crews commented on the complexity of suppression techniques required when even a small amount of wind can quickly spread fire through the stubble.

“I am also grateful for the support we received from crews from NSW, ACT and Queensland, and the South Australia strike teams that helped to protect the town of Goroke.”

While the Grampians fire was the most significant incident in December and January, there were other major fires in late December including at Bullengarook, The Gurdies, Kadnook, Creswick and the Alpine National Park near Whitfield.

**STORY DUNCAN RUSSELL**



# CFA Regulations review



**CFA has seen many changes since its inception and the way we work continues to evolve. To help us do this, it's important we update the Country Fire Authority Regulations 2014.**

All Victorian regulations expire every 10 years and CFA's are due to sunset on 1 August 2025. This follows an extension to ensure implementation of the new regulations did not occur during the Fire Danger Period.

A process to review the regulations began in early 2023 and has involved seeking feedback from CFA members and stakeholders across Victoria, including holding more than 80 consultation sessions attended by more than 780 people. There is also a Members Online page with a frequently asked questions section and information about the review.

A common theme in the feedback was the importance of streamlining and modernising CFA's regulations to remove duplication and red tape so that the time and contribution of our volunteers in protecting their communities is better recognised and respected.

CFA used this feedback to help the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) identify ways the current regulations can be improved with a focus on:

- Administrative matters such as CFA proceedings, registration of CFA brigades and groups, brigade model rules and elections, and financial management of brigades.

- Membership of brigades including conduct and membership requirements and duties.
- Employee and volunteer discipline and appeals including disciplinary breaches, investigations, hearing of disciplinary matters and suspension provisions.
- Volunteer compensation for officers and members of brigades and industry brigades.
- Fees and charges for CFA services and false alarms.
- Fire prevention measures including fire permits, conditions or restrictions on engaging in high fire risk activities, and fire suppression equipment.
- Compliance requirements for fire alarm monitoring.

A more formal public consultation process led by DJCS about the new set of regulations has now started. DJCS has published draft regulations along with a Regulatory Impact Statement that sets out how the new regulations affect businesses, communities and individuals.

Members of the public and CFA members can provide feedback on the proposals. To read the draft regulations and give feedback, use the QR code to access the Members Online page.

You can also use the QR code to access more information or to register for updates.



**STORY BRIGID ENNIS**

## Bartlett, helping your brigade protect life and property

### Flexitanks



- Utilised in firefighting applications
- Suitable for training and field use.
- Available tank sizes 500L - 24,000L
- Supplied with ground sheet / carry bag
- Detachable lids available
- Helicopter capable collar available



**Order today!**

**Free Call 1800 115 440**  
172 Ring Road, Ballarat, Victoria  
[www.bartlett.net.au](http://www.bartlett.net.au)

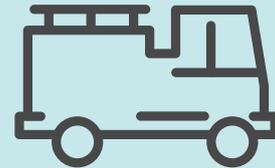
**Bartlett**  
Industrial Textile Product  
Manufacturing

# UPDATE ON CFA PROJECTS

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

## Driver training

Last quarter, on-road and off-road driving training started to be delivered with the first six courses scheduled. This will continue throughout 2025. Five training trucks were delivered to CFA in late 2024 and a further five were delivered in February 2025. These can be booked at VEMTC training grounds for state or district courses. External providers are now offering heavy vehicle licence training across the state, which removes the out-of-pocket expense for members. Driver educator courses continue to be delivered to build our driving instructor capacity. CFA will produce procurement documents (including detailed specifications) to identify a provider to deliver a Mobile Driving Simulator

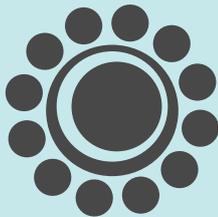


## Next generation CFA pumper

We are replacing our ageing pumper fleet with an updated vehicle. Last quarter we received two cab chassis, completed consultation for the locker layout, and produced the first drawings for manufacture. Sub-assembly production started in early 2024.

## Diversity and inclusion

As at December 2024, 19 of 96 current CFA projects have gender inclusion assessments. This assessment tool uses a scientific approach to test and measure the impact of different initiatives.



This quarter the D&I team will review how the D&I Standards and Behavioural Standards connect and refine the messaging to promote understanding to support the cultural shift we want to achieve. Inclusion assessment training sessions are being scheduled for each function and region.

## Safety Compliance Project

The Safety Compliance Project improves the health and safety of firefighters by targeting identified areas of OH&S risk. The Safe Working at Heights and Low Voltage Fuse Removal props at West Sale and Longerenong training campuses are close to being commissioned. Construction of the prop at Peshurst is expected to be completed by March 2025. A trial of a ladder attachment is underway to improve attachment to guttering for firefighter safety.



## Wildfire respiratory protection

Following a trial of alternate wildfire respiratory protection products, Infrastructure Services Management Committee has endorsed a recommendation to go to market for a single supply contract consisting of half and full face masks and filters. Specifications are being finalised and procurement will begin shortly.



# TRAINING THE NEXT CROP OF BUSHFIRE INVESTIGATORS

Story by Alison Smirnoff

**On the eve of the 2024-25 bushfire season, CFA and Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic) hosted their annual multi-agency bushfire investigation course in Castlemaine. Participants from CFA, FFMVic, Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV), Parks Victoria, Victoria Police and Forensic Services learned how to investigate the origin and cause of bushfires.**

The five-day course is designed for new fire investigators and is a mixture of classroom theory and practical training. Heading up the team of bushfire investigation trainers was Brett Wagstaff, a bushfire instructor based in Kangaroo Flat in District 2.

“We undertake classroom training. We also back that up by spending time out in the bush, lighting fires, observing burn and char patterns and then investigating those fires,” Brett said.

“This year, we chose to have fires in both forest and grass to cater for both FFMVic and CFA, and to ensure that we cover all fuel types.”

Fire investigation plays a crucial role in fire prevention, and ensuring the presence of a statewide network of skilled fire investigators is an important part of CFA’s function. Accordingly, CFA has committed significant resources, time and effort into the fire investigation training pathway.

One of the course participants, Wayne Munro, is a CFA member with close to 40 years of firefighting experience under his belt. He’s a member of Grassdale Fire Brigade in South West Region and also the group officer for Merino.

“I’ve been on the other end, fighting fires and then in command-and-control structures, and this course is part of my continual learning that CFA offers,” Wayne said. “I want to investigate fires to try to find the causes so that we can stop some of the fires in our area. But I also wanted to hand back some of my knowledge and experience to CFA.”

Some of the techniques used to detect the path of a fire include staining on rocks, char patterns on trees and orientation of leaves after a fire has passed through. For Wayne, one of the biggest takeaways from the course was changing the way he now looks at fires.

“I’ve learned to look at fires in reverse and to look at minute things. Traditionally, we’ve always been taught to bring in the bulldozers, add the water, put the fire out and then go home. And now we’re learning to make sure the scene is protected, to get down on our hands and knees and look at the way the grass is burned, how the leaves are burned and watching the trees. It has totally opened my eyes up to a whole new way of looking at fires,” Wayne explained.

Baxter Fire Brigade’s Kate Sanderson has been a member of CFA for seven years. Although her time at CFA has been relatively short, fire investigation has been one of her long-held ambitions.

“It’s something I wanted to do for a long, long time and I researched the pathways to get into fire investigation,” Kate said. “I came across CFA and discovered that if I had at least five years’ volunteer experience, I would be considered for training [in fire investigation]. So that’s the reason I joined CFA, and I have loved the experience and have learned so much along the way.”

For the practical elements of the course, the participants were divided into small groups to observe active fires in grassland and forest, before returning the following day to investigate



these fires. On the final day of the course, they were tasked with investigating another group’s fire scene. The opportunity to observe live fire in real settings is a key feature of the course.

“It was a great course. To be able to observe a fire in the bush and watch its behaviour was so invaluable,” Kate said. “It is known that terrain and weather affect fire behaviour, but it was so useful to stand back and watch how it burns, rather than from a firefighter’s perspective of putting out a fire as soon as possible.”

Pentland Group Officer and Myrning Fire Brigade Firefighter Dale Salathiel’s pathway to fire investigation was informed through his role with Victoria Police where he has been exposed to arson investigations, and the challenges of trying to determine fire cause.

“I’ve just had an interest in this space, with investigations that I do through my job at Victoria Police – things that I’ve seen with arson and the investigative tools that come with that,” Dale said.

The five-day course is only the first step in the process to becoming a bushfire investigator. After the course, each participant is paired with a mentor and tasked with attending and investigating five scenes over the following 18 months.



At the time of writing, Dale had already attended four scenes, with his first coming the weekend after the course finished.

"I finished the course on the Friday and by the weekend I was straight into it. I ended up going to the large fire at Kadnook, the Casterton-Edenhope Road fire, which was a two-day deployment," Dale said

Visiting scenes and investigating fire origin and path is just one piece of the fire investigation puzzle. Investigators must spend a significant amount of time preparing written reports after the scene examination is completed. This element was also covered in the course.

"It's one thing to travel to the scene and go back home. But it's the report writing. It's collating the weather, the lightning data, the witness statements, the maps, and writing up the report so someone who wasn't at the fire can understand what occurred," Kate explained.

As well as the opportunity to learn from experienced trainers and mentors, Kate has found the support from her fellow CFA members on the course to be invaluable.

"The six of us are staying in touch and telling each other when we've been out to scenes, so that's been really helpful. Our stories and backgrounds are so different; it's just so exciting to be amongst them," Kate said.

Dale added: "I think that the group motivates each other by working off one another, staying in touch and communicating. I think it's helped us all work together and help bring each other through."

For anyone thinking about undertaking the bushfire investigation pathway, Wayne Munro had these words of wisdom.

"If you're joining this course just to get a tick on a piece of paper, I'd suggest not doing it. You have to do a lot of training to become accredited. But if you're interested in fine detail and want to help the community I'd say go for it every day. CFA is great at training fire investigators.

"If you wish to follow your dream or passion, CFA gives you plenty of opportunities to do it – and I think it's fantastic."

To watch a video about this group's training scan the QR code.





**BREAKING NEWS**

**HARRY**

**MADI**

**JUNIOR FIREFIGHTER REPORTERS**

# A new way to teach children

**CFA’s current children’s education program Fire Safe Kids (FSK) was developed in 2011. It includes a series of classroom lessons and a separate operational lesson that involves a truck and fire hose demonstration. Since 2011 there have been many developments in the field of education and CFA must address these changes.**

Classrooms look different to those of a decade ago. Children interact with more digital media, have shorter attention spans and have more electronic devices in their homes and bedrooms. Houses are consumed by fire more rapidly than they were 20 years ago, giving children less time to safely exit.

Research shows that children need to be taught fire safety messaging appropriate to their age. For example, teaching ‘stop, drop and roll’ to young children can cause them to stop and drop when they hear a smoke alarm instead of exiting. In addition, the latest Victorian curriculum rolls out in 2026.

In the past 18 months the Community Engagement team has redeveloped the program. Initially, feedback was sought from members, educators and parents to better understand the challenges and successes of FSK. Then consultative groups were established with volunteers and regional and headquarters staff to provide additional valuable insights. Members were enthusiastic about being involved.

“The group brings together a wide range of both professional and CFA experiences which is fabulous and very helpful in creating this new training program,” Leopold brigade member Carol Conway said.

“Such remarkable enhancements with up-to-date videos and literature to utilise. I am looking forward to rolling this out as soon as possible,” District 8 BASO and Pakenham Upper brigade member Lisa Hicks said.

“It’s a massive passion of mine to be involved with educating children and the community, and I am so proud to be able to help with developing the new programs,” Kyneton brigade member Cathryn Portelli said.

All the contributions from members helped CFA to design three new offerings for children:

## **Truck Time**

The operational lesson is now a standalone program called Truck Time. It’s best delivered at community events, school fetes and fire station open days, but can also take place during school hours. Training will consist of a 30-minute elearning module on the Learning Hub.



## **Fire Wise Kids**

Fire Wise Kids is CFA’s new in-classroom program delivered by CFA members. The five new 30 to 60-minute lessons cover the most important aspects of fire safety for children including smoke alarms, exiting safely, home hazards, calling Triple Zero, basic fire science, outdoor fire safety and more. These lessons are tailored to age groups from kindergarten to Year 4. Training will be conducted online, followed by a single in-person day. If you’re interested in Fire Wise Kids training, you can submit an expression of interest via the community engagement catalogue on the Learning Hub now. All training will begin in mid-2025.



## **Online resources**

To support schools with limited access to brigade members, CFA has developed lesson plans and activities (available on the CFA website) that teachers can undertake with their students. There are also new children’s fire safety videos on CFA’s YouTube channel – use this QR code to watch them.



Members who have already done Fire Safe Kids training will need to do the new training. The updated training supports all members to deliver these programs and ensures child safety compliance and learning outcomes are achieved. Endorsed presenters will be given a Fire Wise Kids resource kit with new posters and materials to support program delivery.

Fire Safe Kids will be withdrawn at the end of 2025 to allow time for members to be trained and endorsed in Fire Wise Kids, ready to deliver in 2026. This also allows time for brigades to liaise with their schools and book in sessions for the following year.

**STORY SIOBHAN GREENE AND ELISSA JANS**

# Echuca teen steps up in NSW



**When 16-year-old CFA member Sophie Amos set out for the NSW State Firefighting Championships in Wagga Wagga late last year, she never imagined she'd return home to Echuca with real-life firefighting experience under her belt.**

When Sophie and her Echuca Fire Brigade teammates returned to their accommodation after a long day of competition, the smell of smoke caught their attention. Driving through the streets to investigate, they discovered flames lighting up the night sky.

"When we pulled around the corner, we couldn't see or hear any fire trucks, so I got on the phone to call Triple Zero," Sophie said.

"Almost immediately after, a fire truck came racing towards us. We introduced ourselves to the crew and asked how we could help."

Sophie, who had only recently completed her General Firefighter training, soon found herself assisting at the fireground – setting up water points, connecting hoses and uninking lines.

"Everything I'd learned during training really came together in that moment," Sophie said.

Back at their accommodation, Sophie's father and CFA volunteer Doug Amos (pictured above with Sophie) waited anxiously for updates.

"To see her head off to her first fire was a moment I'll always remember," Doug said.

"I knew she was with a capable crew, and I was confident she'd step up. Sophie has worked so hard for this, from helping during the 2022 Echuca floods to earning the award of Junior Firefighter of the Year last summer."

Sophie is used to throwing herself in at the deep end. During the Echuca floods, Sophie wanted to know what was happening so Doug suggested she should go to the fire station.

"Up to 450 people were rotating through the station and Sophie was there for hours every day for two weeks cooking and

cleaning," Doug said. "When the Governor-General of the Commonwealth visited the floods, I told him about Sophie's amazing work. He said she deserved a Governor-General Medallion and he found one for her. I was incredibly proud of her."

The Governor-General Medallion, also called the National Medal, is awarded to outstanding Australians to recognise long and diligent service.

Sophie made friends with everyone during the flood, including Army personnel who were helping with the flood response. The Army offered to take Sophie to school on the first day of the term.

"Two Bushmaster military vehicles turned up on our doorstep and drove her to school. It was a most bizarre time.

Firefighting is a family tradition for the Amos family. Sophie grew up inspired by her father, uncle and cousin, who have all been members of Echuca Fire Brigade at one time or another.

She joined CFA's Junior running team at age 13 and has been a dedicated member ever since. She hopes her experiences can inspire other young people to consider volunteering.

"CFA has really helped me grow as a person," Sophie said. "I've met amazing people and gained skills I never thought I'd have. I'd recommend it to any young person. You never know where it might lead you.

"Being on the frontline of an actual fire showed me the real impact we can have. It's not just about fighting fires, it's about being part of something bigger."

What does the future hold for Sophie?

"She's a natural leader," Doug said. "She wants to study engineering at university, so we'll see where that takes her. And the sky's the limit for her at CFA."

STORY JAMES TAYLOR

# Australia Day 2025 Honours

Congratulations to the five CFA members and one secondee who received the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) for their work in emergency services.



## Fiona Burns AFSM

Fiona has been an inspirational member of CFA for more than 21 years, serving as an operational member of two brigades (Launching Place and Hillcrest). She is the current group officer of Yarra Valley Group.

Fiona has distinguished herself through her outstanding ability as a capable Level 3 planning officer in incident management teams in Victoria and Canada.

"I love this role because I can take my fireground skills and use them in ICCs to support our firefighters on the frontline," Fiona said.

Fiona is also an experienced fireground commander where she identifies emerging operational leaders. She is also a mentor in CFA's statewide Women In Leadership Mentoring Program.

"I've been fortunate to have incredible mentors and supporters who share their knowledge and experiences with me, and I believe that it's my responsibility to do the same for emerging leaders."

Her extensive analytical ability was influential during the successful transition of the former Launching Place and Woori Yallock brigades into one new brigade – Hillcrest Fire Brigade – in 2007.

Fiona is also a founding committee member of the Teenage Road Information Program (TRIP). This hard-hitting program is delivered in a funeral home.

"TRIP is my passion. The program is designed to be thought-provoking and initiate conversations between mates and families about making good decisions."



## Mark King AFSM

For more 30 years, Mark has exemplified the spirit of volunteer firefighting in Victoria. During this time, he has held critical leadership roles including strike team leader, sector commander, divisional commander and health team leader. His leadership has been instrumental during some of the country's most challenging incidents including campaign fires and flood emergencies across Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania.

A cornerstone of Mark's contribution is his focus on firefighter health and safety. He spearheaded the launch of the first firefighter rehabilitation unit in South East Region. These units, which are now used statewide, carry health monitoring equipment, CO-oximeters, special chairs that immerse the forearms in cold water, wash station, defibrillator and a first-aid kit to help firefighters make a speedy recovery.

"At a fire in the Westbury area, a young woman came down with heat stress," Mark explained. "We couldn't get an ambulance to her for some time and she was very upset. A couple of days later, at the same fire, my son also suffered heat stress. That really prompted me to start looking into solutions."

Since 2004, Mark has been a fire investigator in districts 9, 10, 11 and 27 and is also a volunteer trainer and assessor, equipping countless members with essential skills in breathing apparatus operation, tanker licensing and general firefighting techniques.

"My main priority is ensuring firefighters are safe on the fireground."



## Tim Smith AFSM

Tim is a seasoned firefighter and respected leader who has dedicated more than 42 years of volunteer service to Hurstbridge Fire Brigade. He has held various leadership positions including lieutenant and captain and is deputy group officer for Nillumbik Group.

Valued for his expertise as a strike team leader, Tim has been an integral part of numerous significant firefighting efforts including the Ash Wednesday fires in 1983, the 2009 fires and the Black Summer campaign fires in 2019-20.

"The incidents that have a profound effect on people are the ones that stay with you," Tim said. "The community I live in is so important to me and being able to play a small part in providing an emergency service in town is the highlight of my time with CFA."

Believing in the importance of diversity and brigades reflecting the communities they serve, he has played a vital role in mentoring the next generation of women volunteer leaders through his role in the Women in Leadership Mentoring Program.

Tim became a CFA staff member in 2006, having worked in Metropolitan Fire Brigade's (now FRV) Fleet Team for 16 years. Now CFA's Manager Fleet Operations, Tim has been instrumental in modernising and maintaining the CFA fleet.

"Appliance design has evolved considerably over time, with safety being the biggest driver of change as well as the need to meet tighter emissions standards in more recent times," Tim said.



### **Lisa Hicks AFSM**

Lisa has been a dedicated member of CFA for almost 50 years. During this time, she has served in a range of roles in Narre Warren North and Pakenham Upper brigades and supporting roles in Cardinia Group. She is also employed full-time as a brigade administrative support officer.

She has supported incident control centres and incident management teams for 30 years as a public information officer and is an endorsed crew leader. She has also delivered the Fire Safe Kids Program to local schools and kindergartens for the past 20 years.

“Although each class is different, the children are like sponges absorbing the information and when you deliver the information in a fun way, they learn better,” Lisa said.

As a dedicated firefighter for almost 50 years, Lisa has been on the frontline of many major fires including the 1983 Ash Wednesday fire at Upper Beaconsfield. She responded on Narre Warren North brigade’s tanker and was on one of the first trucks on scene.

“It was a hot, windy day and nothing was going to stop the fire. We just did what we could, wherever we could. We never stopped fighting until late that night when we changed crews.

“Through the heartache of the loss of fellow firefighters, we took comfort that this was a turning point for CFA to make sure it was never repeated. We now have crew protection, better radio communication, strike teams and incident control centres.”



### **Mark Gunning AFSM**

Mark Gunning’s 44 years of service to CFA, Fire Rescue Victoria and the broader fire and emergency services is testament to his commitment to the protection and wellbeing of all Victorians. His remarkable contributions span frontline response, incident management, fire operations, flood response and crisis leadership.

Mark joined Mortlake brigade in 1980 as a teenager. He attended the largest Ash Wednesday fire in 1983, and in 1985 he was on the frontline during the Little River fire. He credits these experiences for further teaching him important skills and knowledge about fire behaviour.

“Ash Wednesday had a huge impact on me as a volunteer, especially being local to the area and knowing so many of the people who were affected,” Mark said.

In 1988, Mark became a CFA career firefighter and contributed significantly as an operational leader, working his way through the ranks to his current role as assistant chief fire officer regional commander.

Mark is well known for his commitment to ensuring communities are not only protected during emergencies, but are also better prepared for future fires and other emergencies.

“You spend weeks building relationships with members of communities; you get to know them and their lives, and they start to see you as one of their own. What I’ve learned at major fires about working with communities was reflected in my approach at the recent Grampians fires.”



### **Diana Billingsley AFSM**

Diana (Di) joined Boolarra Fire Brigade as one of the first female members in 1998. She has attended many incidents in the past two decades including responding to the Delburn Complex fire a week before the Black Saturday fires in 2009, which Di attended as a crew leader.

“I watched my best friends house explode in the Delburn fire. I was teaching Year 12 in Churchill after Black Saturday and more than half the students I taught were impacted either by Black Saturday or Delburn. It becomes very personal,” Di said.

Di was a crew leader during the 2019-20 Black Summer fires where she flew in to provide support and work proactively with communities.

She is also an experienced volunteer trainer and assessor, having delivered a substantial number of courses to volunteers. In 2023 she was deployed to the Northern Territory to conduct essential training in Alice Springs and Darwin for volunteers and park rangers.

Di serves on the CFA Women’s Advisory Committee, driving positive change for women in her district and beyond and pours her time into the Captains Peer Mentor Program.

She was brigade captain from 2014 to 2021, and during this time she implemented a debriefing process after all incidents.

“I’m incredibly grateful to all the amazing people I have worked with and learned from over the years.”

# New strike team leader training



**The roles of crew leader and strike team leader (STL) are critical on the fireground and are pivotal to effectively manage emergencies and keep our members safe. These roles not only need technical skills in fire suppression, but they are also heavily reliant on people management skills.**

It's often said that the effectiveness of a crew or strike team on the fireground is significantly influenced by the morale, cohesion and unity of task. Leader roles are highly respected and there's a huge demand for the strike team leader and crew leader courses that lead to member endorsement.

Operational Doctrine and Training has recently released the long-awaited STL and crew leader courses for scheduling. The scheduling of courses at a district level will be dependent on a number of factors including training need priority, instructor availability and seasonal needs.

The STL course was the first to be delivered following a period of significant development to ensure it meets our requirements and equips members to lead their team through the many demanding operational and leadership challenges.

The new course combines soft skills training, which takes operational leadership to the next level in difficult and unfamiliar territory with perhaps unfamiliar crews and equipment, with operational decision-making. It also has an engaging video scenario as part of assessment. The course includes up to nine hours of training and assessment which can be delivered in a

variety of ways. For example, West Region recently delivered a number of courses with 10 members per course across one evening and one daytime session, combining the theory then scenarios assessment.

The video scenario assessment ensures that the learning outcomes are met consistently and, from the student's perspective, are delivered in a practical and lifelike scenario.

Instructor Angus Rollinson from West Region recently delivered the course and believes that the inclusion of the first-person video is a fantastic addition to replicate the practical roles our members undertake.

"I feel that this method of assessment is the closest to doing the real thing," Angus said.

As members complete the course, they will also need to complete the fire weather fundamentals course, which will be delivered over 90 minutes online or face to face. This ensures the students have the vital fire behaviour elements to perform the role safely.

Successful completion of both the STL and fire weather fundamentals course will provide the skills to be endorsed as a STL. STL courses will be rolled out in districts based on need. If you are interested in nominating for a course, speak with your captain then complete an expression of interest on the Learning Hub.

**STORY ROHAN LUKE**

# QUARTERLY OPERATIONAL UPDATE



## Chief Officer's message for autumn

As the fire season draws nearer to a close, I would like to thank our members for their ongoing efforts in supporting the Victorian community throughout the season. At the time of publishing,

there have been a number of notable fires, particularly in the western part of the state, with fires in a number of the national and state parks, including the Otways, Grampians and Little Desert. Those in West Region have been challenged with two difficult, consecutive seasons, with brigades and groups going above and beyond for prolonged periods. The tireless dedication, bravery and unwavering commitment of those in this part of the state, and those deploying to assist them, is to be applauded and does not go unnoticed.

As we approach the cooler months, our service delivery will shift as will the associated risks. It is important that members familiarise themselves with the content of this update to be aware of potential risks and CFA expectations leading into autumn.

### Credible Critical Issues (CCI)

Credible Critical Issues (CCIs) are hazards relevant to CFA's operations that have the potential to cause serious injury or even a fatality. In this update we are looking at two specific hazards: entrapment and vehicle rollovers. We share information about the controls put in place to ensure CFA's safety systems, supervision and training are effective in reducing the risk to our members.

### Radio signals

There are a number of radio signals that should be used by members to communicate certain messages, request the appropriate resources and support and maintain safety. We provide a refresher on these signals, with a specific focus on signals 40 and 55 so members are aware of the appropriate signal in response to hostile acts. It is important that these signals are adopted and understood by all CFA personnel because they ensure the safety of those on scene and those who may be responding and not aware of the current situation.

### Cultural heritage sites

It is important that brigades understand what a cultural heritage site is and develop the knowledge to be able to recognise potential sites ensuring we meet the obligations and manage them appropriately. This information sheet also explores what to do if you discover a heritage site during an incident and what information you should collect to report the site to your district.

### Case studies

This edition's case studies include findings from an investigation into recent burnovers and burn unders and an investigation into an incident where a CFA member was working from a roof. I encourage all members to read these and consider the application of the lessons identified in their own operational response as they provide valuable insights from incidents.

### Importance of after-action reviews

As the fire season draws to a close, it is timely to remind members of the importance of after-action reviews (AARs). These are a key component of CFA's continuous improvement cycle, enabling us to collect information regarding what is working well and what requires improvement. 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 organisation-wide improvement.

All members are encouraged to submit their individual observations and brigades, districts and regions to undertake AARs after the season. Whether you went on a strike team and have observations, or you identified a significant learning opportunity during local response, your observations and AARs form a critical part in assisting CFA with understanding our opportunities for improvement ahead of the next fire season. Any observations and AARs should be submitted to [aar@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:aar@cfa.vic.gov.au).

The Lessons Management Centre has recently improved the materials on Members Online to support AARs. You can access them by scanning the QR code.



If you have any other questions or require additional support, reach out to your catchment officer or the AAR team at [aar@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:aar@cfa.vic.gov.au).

Once again, I would like to thank you all for your efforts this season. You and your teams embody the true spirit of service, and the resilience you displayed under immense pressure is truly commendable.

Please remember to take care of yourselves, your colleagues and your families, and take the time to rest and recover after what was a demanding season. Seek out our wellbeing services if you need some additional support. They can be accessed 24/7 by calling **1800 959 232**.

Use this QR code to access the Quarterly Update along with a number of other topics that may be of interest.



# Credible critical issues (hazards with fatality potential)

Credible critical issues are hazards in CFA operations that are potentially fatal. CFA has undertaken a thorough process to identify, assess and validate existing risk controls for these hazards to reassure members that these controls are effective. It's important that members understand these hazards and follow training, doctrine and guidance on managing them so that everyone goes home safely.

## Entrapment

Entrapment, resulting in a burnover, is a critical hazard for CFA that can lead to serious injury or death of a member. Wildfire behaviour and conditions can rapidly change so it's important that everyone understands the tools available to prevent this from occurring as well as what to do if one should occur. There are several existing programs and systems, known as controls, in place to reduce the risks posed to our members.

## Training

The General Firefighter training and Bushfire Firefighter Reference Manual provide our members with the knowledge and understanding of fire behaviour and tools such as LACES and WATCHOUT so they are able to avoid being placed in a life-threatening situation.

## Entrapment SOP 9.32

The bushfire entrapment procedure for appliances is embedded within doctrine in SOP 9.32. This mandates the requirement for operational members to undertake the annual entrapment drill to ensure our members are well prepared and equipped with the skills and knowledge to handle an entrapment situation.

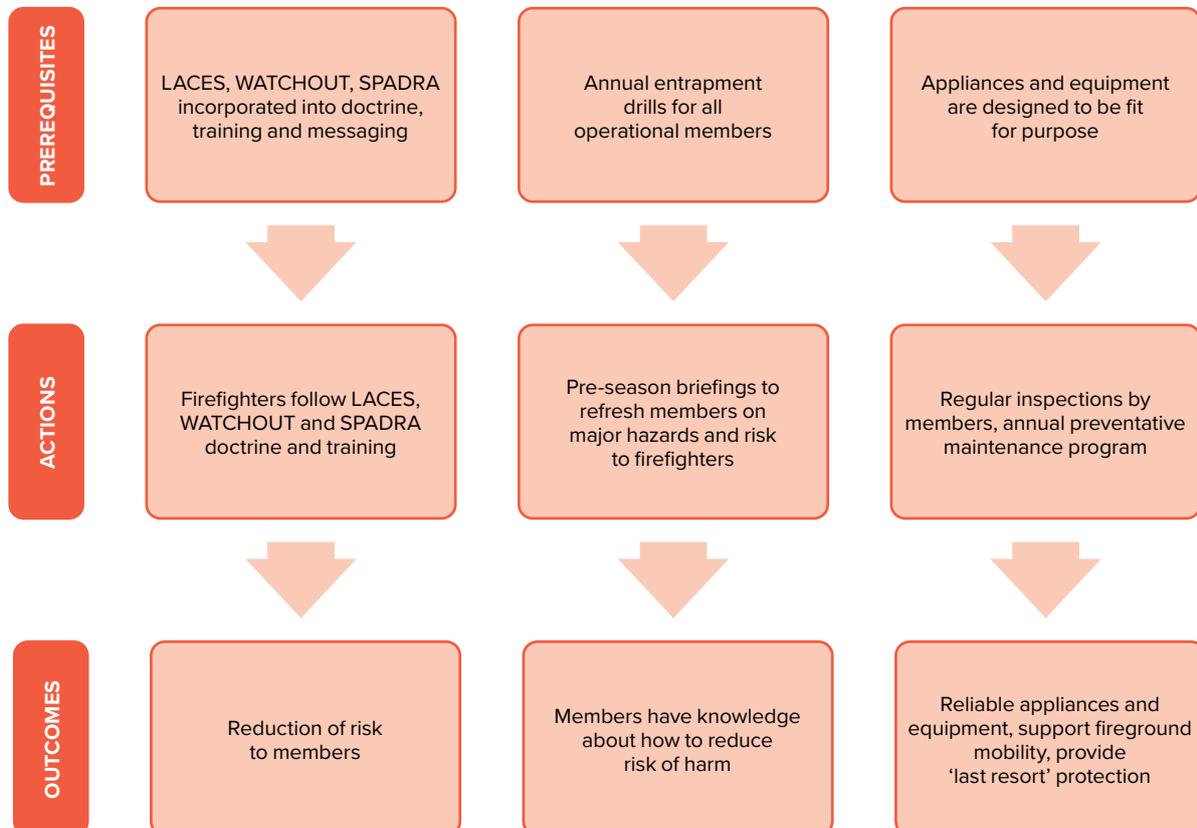
## Protection systems and maintenance

All tankers that carry more than 1,000 litres have:

- water-based cabin/body deluge system
- radiant heat shielding
- cabin internal/deck radiant heat curtains
- occupant space access to fire blankets/PPE
- fail-safe control and system alarming
- annual preventative maintenance program ensures all tankers are roadworthy.



## Maintaining safety



## Vehicle rollover

Vehicle rollover is a critical risk for CFA that can lead to serious injury or death of a member. There are a number of controls in place to reduce the risk and prevent harm, ensuring the safety of our members.

## Vehicle design, fit-out and maintenance

Where practical, vehicles are designed with a low centre of gravity to improve vehicle stability. Tankers that weigh more than 4.5 tonnes are fitted with the Rollover Protection Structure (ROPS) to ensure member safety. There is also the annual preventative maintenance program which consists of inspections, repairs and replacement of critical components.



## Training

There are also driver education courses for members to learn how to control a CFA vehicle both on-road and off-road.

On-road driver training focuses on:

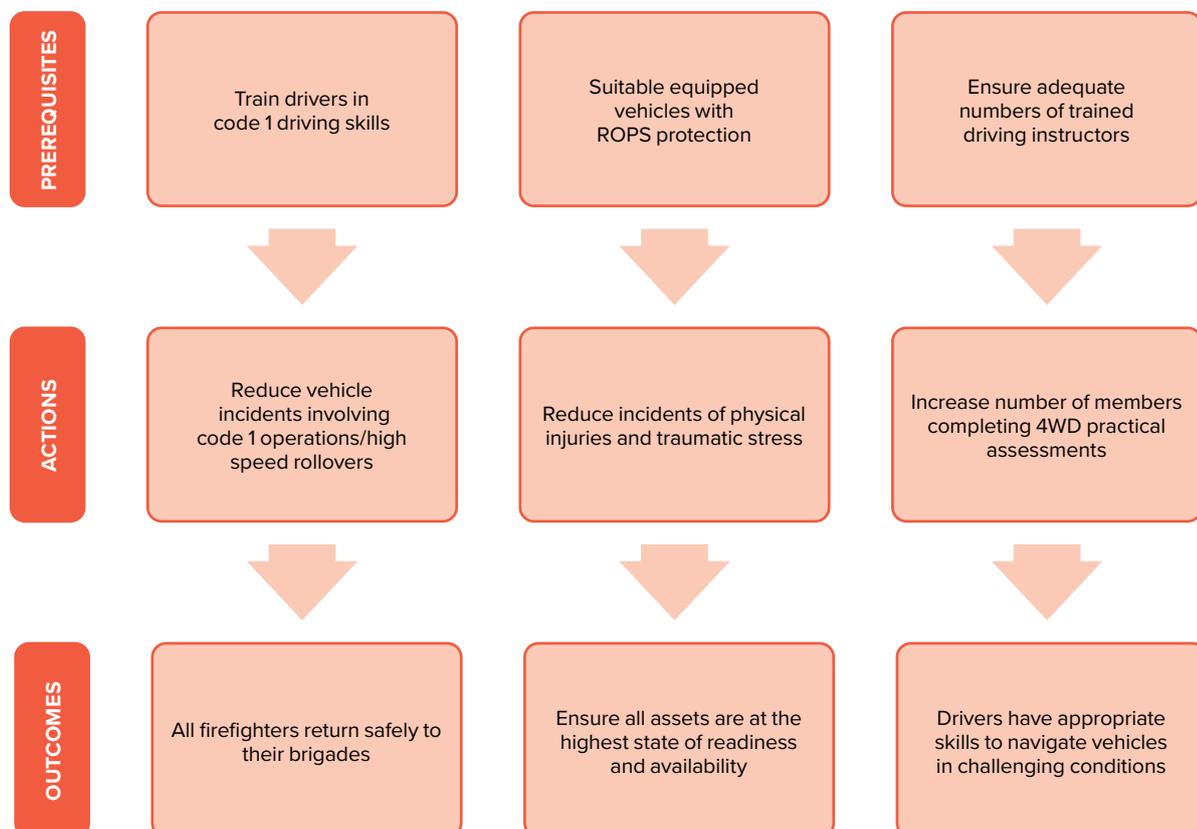
- vehicle control
- identifying road condition
- vehicle familiarisation
- developing good observation skills
- understanding legislation and policy
- road craft
- collision avoidance space.

Off-road driver training focuses on:

- track assessment (seven rules)
- vehicle familiarisation
- safely negotiate off-road environments
- identify and deal with dangerous situations
- system of vehicle control for off-road conditions.



## Maintaining safety



# Radio signals

The risk environment that CFA operational personnel are exposed to is changing. It presents many new and challenging situations for frontline members when interacting with the general public. Even though the first reaction is usually to help people, sometimes the best response is to move to a safe place and wait for more help.

In 2019, Signal 5-5 was expanded to incorporate an additional four signals which were developed in line with the MFB (now FRV) and Ambulance Victoria procedures.

We have received feedback that sometimes these signals are not always used in the correct context, which has the potential to cause confusion for personnel monitoring these signals. This includes Firecom operators at Triple Zero Victoria, fire services communications controllers (FSCCs) and the CFA state duty officer or district duty officers, who are all part of the notification process when signals are called by crews at an incident.

Members should be aware that CFA SOP 9.15 Mayday and Hostile Acts Radio Signals has recently been updated and reissued. Incorporated in the SOP is a suite of signals commonly used as part of operational radio transmissions, whether initiated by crews on scene or escalated in certain situations by Firecom.

All CFA personnel are expected to understand these signals in case they are used during an incident.

The chart below has been produced as a sticker that can be used as a quick reference guide to explain the different signals and their meaning. The sticker should be applied to the dashboard of the following vehicles:

- All fire trucks and specialist vehicles.
- Corporate operational vehicles fitted with CFA radios.
- Brigade-owned vehicles fitted with CFA radios.

## Signal 5-5

A Signal 5-5 should be used when CFA crews experience or are exposed to a hostile act, either actual or potential, involving significant violence or terrorism. For example, when crews or members of the community are under attack by one or more perpetrators using weapons such as knives, bats, guns, explosives or a vehicle to harm people.

In this instance, a Signal 5-5 should be called. Firecom will acknowledge the Signal 5-5 and request details about the situation. Firecom will immediately notify Victoria Police to request their urgent attendance. The on-duty FSCC and SDO/DDO will also be advised of the situation and will monitor it. They may also provide advice and direction to on-scene crews to assist with their response to the situation.

All personnel on the fireground must be made aware of the Signal 5-5 situation and should withdraw to a safe location and wait for Victoria Police.

## Signal 4-0

A Signal 4-0 is distinctly different from a situation requiring a Signal 5-5. In a Signal 4-0, there is a perpetrator on scene who is threatening crews or the public with violence or abuse. Although it is not an act of terrorism and there is no direct violence involving weapons, it does require urgent assistance from Victoria Police.

A Signal 4-0 will also be passed onto police as an urgent notification to attend the scene to assist crews. This is actioned as a discrete signal and will be acknowledged by Firecom, but Firecom won't initially ask for additional information via the radio because this may be broadcast over external radio speakers and may further agitate the perpetrator threatening the violence, escalating the situation.

If additional information is required, it can be passed on via a telephone call or transmitted at a time when it won't be heard over a wide area.

Signal	Pronunciation	Meaning
5-5	Fife Fife	A hostile act, either actual or potential, with significant violence or terrorism.  Note: VicPol will be automatically notified.  <b>Example:</b> crews/community under attack. One or more perpetrators. Weapons ranging from rudimentary to complex – bat, knife, automatic weapons, explosives.
4-0	Four Zero	Urgent police attendance required, crew(s) or public under threat.  <b>Example:</b> Perpetrator on scene threatening crews/public with abuse or physical violence.
5-6	Fife Six	Police attendance required (non-urgent).  <b>Example:</b> Police requested to assist an individual who has been assaulted. Perpetrator not on scene.
8-3	Eight Three	Deceased person.
2-7	Two Seven	CIS (Critical Incident Stress). Team/peer support required.

# Aboriginal and historical heritage

The landscape holds the imprint of thousands of generations of Aboriginal people. During that time, people left physical evidence of their activities that now survive as cultural heritage places and objects. Aboriginal Heritage can be found all over Victoria and are often near major food sources such as rivers, lakes, swamps and the coast.

Heritage places and objects provide community benefits, which includes creating a sense of place, belonging and identity. Heritage places often serve as landmarks and can provide tangible familiarity.

It is important that brigades understand what a cultural heritage site is and develop the knowledge to be able to recognise potential sites ensuring we meet the obligations and manage them appropriately.

## Historical heritage

The heritage significance of a place or object may also relate to its history, its relationship to known people or events, its social and aesthetic values and its significance to a particular group of people. Places may also gain cultural significance through their associations with known people or events, or with traditional belief and practices. These places may have aesthetic, archaeological, architectural, cultural, scientific or other special cultural values and can include:

- buildings
- structures
- cemeteries
- mines
- water races
- huts
- railways and associated infrastructure
- bridges
- objects and collections
- archaeological sites.

### More information

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

[History.org.au](http://History.org.au)

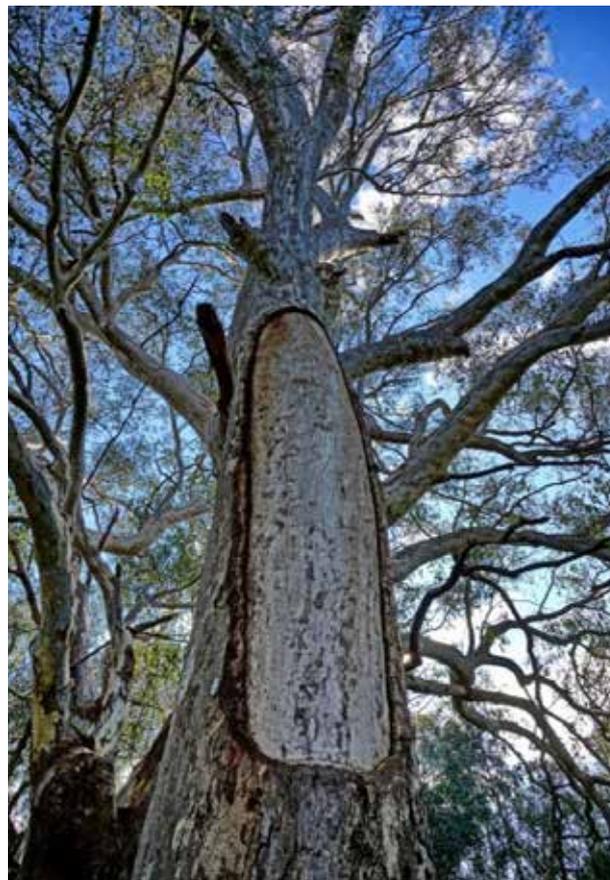
[planning.vic.gov.au/guides-and-resources/guides/all-guides/local-heritage-protection](http://planning.vic.gov.au/guides-and-resources/guides/all-guides/local-heritage-protection)

## Aboriginal heritage

Aboriginal cultural significance refers to the deep connection that Aboriginal peoples have with their culture, land, spirituality and lore. It is the importance of a place, object, or tradition. It is also central to identity and encompasses a wide range of traditional practices, beliefs, and expressions. It conveys meaning and value while also providing an essential link to the past, present and future.

Aboriginal cultural heritage that might be encountered or impacted by an incident are:

- stone tools and artefact scatters
- scarred trees
- rock art
- stone quarries
- shell middens
- earth mounds
- grinding grooves
- burials.



### More information

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

[aboriginalheritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/victoria-registered-aboriginal-parties](http://aboriginalheritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/victoria-registered-aboriginal-parties)

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

[members.cfa.vic.gov.au/articledocuments/3134/2021\\_Parks\\_Victoria\\_Aboriginal\\_Heritage\\_Identification\\_Guide\\_5499.pdf.aspx](http://members.cfa.vic.gov.au/articledocuments/3134/2021_Parks_Victoria_Aboriginal_Heritage_Identification_Guide_5499.pdf.aspx)

## What to do if you discover a heritage site

- leave the heritage in place
- notify the person in charge, ensure discovery is reported
- create buffer zone to make sure the area is not disturbed
- communicate the discovery to all on site
- instruct everyone to avoid the area
- seek advice on mitigation and protection.

If a heritage site is under immediate threat, implement the most appropriate fire suppression techniques to protect the site. It is important to ensure heritage protection mitigations and/or suppressions are carried out during an incident are appropriately communicated throughout the incident.

When reporting the finding to a CFA district office, give the six-figure grid reference, supply photos, give a description of the heritage and any protection/suppression measures taken. CFA district offices can seek further advice from CFA cultural heritage advisers.



## Fall from height

### Incident overview

In late February 2024, firefighters responded to reports of a fire in a residential unit that was well alight. About seven minutes after the initial page, the incident controller (IC) provided a wordback advising that the structure fire was not yet under control, and that it was contained to one unit and a house and another unit were under threat.

The IC quickly implemented a defensive strategy to combat the fire and minimise spread to exposures. This included all firefighters remaining outside the premises until the fire was fully extinguished.

Ten minutes after the first wordback, the IC provided a sitrep and advised the first unit was destroyed and the adjoining unit had a fire in the roof – smoke was seen coming from the eaves.

Two firefighters used a thermal imaging camera, initially from the ground at the front door of the first unit to identify hot spots and the extent of the fire spread. They identified that heat was present in the internal walls, but they couldn't determine whether the fire had spread to the adjoining unit.

It was decided that the firefighters would access the roof of the adjoining unit to better understand the situation. One of the firefighters then removed tiles from the roof of the adjoining unit to access the roof cavity. They then stepped onto the fire-affected roof and fell through the hole that had been created. The firefighter's BA got caught in the roof trusses which stopped them falling

and they were able to lower themselves to the ground without injury.

Shortly after, the fire was deemed under control with the fire partially damaging the roof of the second unit. The neighbouring house was saved.

### Lessons identified

A number of lessons were identified throughout the ICAM investigation that are relevant to all members.

**Importance of size ups:** It's vital that ICs perform a thorough size-up and effective dynamic risk assessment before determining the incident plan and tasking. These assessments should keep firefighter safety at the forefront, in line with CFA training using a 'safe persons' approach at all times. This includes consideration of the resources available, whether there is appropriate supervision and that all personnel are aware of the potential hazards involved with undertaking a specific task.

**Tasking involving working at height:** Where a task is required to be performed, consideration should be given to the most appropriate, effective and safe way to undertake it. Where it requires potentially working at height, it should be assessed whether this can be completed from ground level, or whether any other measures are required to ensure safety.

**Training and skill set:** All our members bring extensive experience to CFA from their jobs and personal lives. Although this is valuable, it's important to ensure that safety is considered and all actions taken at an incident

are consistent with CFA's doctrine and the training and competency of each individual member.

**Importance of after-action reviews (AARs):** AARs are an important opportunity for members to share their experiences and consider their response to an incident including what worked well and what could be improved. It's important that findings from AARs are captured to allow for actions to be implemented and for broader organisational action and learning. Members are reminded to email a copy of their AAR to [aar@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:aar@cfa.vic.gov.au).

**Improve decision-making:** The IC should appoint a safety officer for work on roofs to ensure good advice and support for these situations. The additional set of eyes and discussion will help minimise or eliminate any observed at-risk work practices.

### When is it safe to work at heights of two metres or above?

The IC should complete a size-up to ensure they have an appreciation for the incident and current situation. In doing so, the IC should apply a safe persons approach and undertake a dynamic risk assessment before determining the incident plan and tasking of activity.

When the incident plan and tasking have been determined, the IC should assess whether this can be carried out with crews working from the ground. If it's not practicable for the emergency response, a safety officer should be appointed before commencement of activities. The safety officer should consider the following:

- How many people are required for the task?
- What is the safest route onto the roof?
- What is the roof's material and is it safe to walk on?
- Consider the roof pitch, surface and condition and if it has been impacted by rain, storm or fire.
- Consider the weather conditions.
- Assess the ground conditions and stability.
- Are there any secondary hazards, such as powerlines, solar panels, skylights, etc?
- Are there any projectiles that could fall from the roof?

### Actions taken by CFA

Following this incident, CFA took several actions to reduce the risk of this situation reoccurring.

- SOP and doctrine are currently being reviewed.
- SOP 9.41 Safe Work at Heights will be renamed SOP 9.41 Prevention of Falls from Height' to reflect the importance of prevention as the most effective control. The revised SOP will include additional details and clarification regarding:
  - Definition of height in accordance with legislative requirements.
  - Added ladder safety requirements.
  - The hierarchy of risk controls that must be applied so far as is reasonably practicable and in order of priority.
  - The application of special provisions for emergency service workers during emergency response activities (OHS Regulations 2017 Part 3.3).
  - The application of safe work at heights equipment for storm and flood recovery operations (excludes hot firefighting operations) and the circumstances when a safety officer must be appointed.
  - Additional safety considerations when working from roofs or external structures.

### Rebranding Safe Work at Heights training

A primary focus of the Safe Work at Heights training package is the use of the fall arrest system. Although the course content will remain unchanged following this incident, consideration is being given to updating the title of the training to reflect the importance of fall arrest systems. Regardless of whether the title changes, this is an opportunity to encourage qualified members to refresh their knowledge about this course, as they may not frequently encounter situations that allow for regular practice with these systems and processes.

It's also worth noting that the fall arrest system shouldn't be used where the roof or wall structures have been impacted by fire.



# Burnover and burn under



## Summary

Burnovers and burn unders can occur at any time and in all conditions. CFA crews need to be constantly aware of their surroundings and be able to respond quickly as conditions on the fireground change. The following scenarios occurred during the 2023-24 fire season on Extreme and Catastrophic fire danger days where CFA crews were in situations where they had to enact burnover and burn under protocols to ensure their safety.

### Burnover incident overview

Significant storms formed in the western part of the state bringing wind, some rain and dry lightning strikes. These conditions contributed to the predicted classification transitioning between Extreme and Catastrophic in the preceding days.

A dry lightning strike ignited a fire which rapidly spread, heading towards a township. A steep ridge line west of the township caused strong and erratic wind and fire behaviour leading up to, during, and after the burnover incident.

A strike team arrived moments after the fire had reached the township and it was immediately tasked with asset protection. As the crews positioned themselves to commence their operations, the wind changed direction and dramatically increased its speed bringing intense smoke and ember attacks.

Two tankers exited the area safely, but the third had to initiate burnover procedures.

### Burn under incident overview

At the time of the incident, the weather forecast and local conditions produced a predicted Fire Behaviour Index of 93 – Extreme bordering on Catastrophic.

A local strike team received orders to perform asset protection down a dirt road lined with gum trees and grazing paddocks either side. Upon entering the area, it was reported that visibility was good with no smoke, though a large smoke plume could be seen ahead of them.

The strike team drove to the end of the road where it entered thick bushland. Considering it too risky to proceed, they turned around and went back a few hundred metres where two houses were situated.

After a while the fire got closer and the wind speed intensified. The crews withdrew to a fallback location close by on the dirt road near a patch of mowed grass, far enough away from two large pine trees. As there were spot fires already developing and burning along the roadside, crews decided it was too risky at that stage to drive out along a tree-lined road.

One tanker pulled up on the road facing away from the fire while another was just off the road to its left-hand side. The FCV positioned itself close to one of the tankers for protection from their sprays.

Firefighters on the back of one of the tankers used their hoses to spray a 20-metre radius around the trucks and FCV, and the other tanker sprayed water about every two to three minutes, protecting the FCV and tankers as the fire went past.

The burn under lasted approximately one to two minutes. There were no physical injuries to firefighters during this incident. There was only superficial damage to the side of the tanker, and some damage to the underside of the bonnet of the FCV, which was smouldering.

### What worked well

**Burnover procedure:** During both incidents, all crew members knew what to do and were able to enact correct entrapment/burnover procedures, resulting in minor damage to the tanker, and no injuries during the actual burnover.

**Fallback point:** The fallback point used at the burn under incident was executed reasonably early and resulted in minimal damage because of the light fuel loads around them, while being away from the risks of possible falling trees. The formation of the vehicles also worked well to protect the FCV and its occupants.

### Lessons identified

**Escape routes:** Crews should always ensure they operate from a suitable anchor point, with the escape routes to this location planned and known. In both incidents, more thought was required on escape routes and having multiple options.

**Decision-making:** Perform appropriate Size Up, LACES, and SPADRA to help with decision-making, situational awareness, and to ensure prevention and management of entrapment risks.

**Vehicle limitations:** Understand the limitations of vehicles and firefighting equipment.

**Communication:** Having constant communication with crew members and actively listening to them is crucial. Communicate the importance of default communications plans to ensure that any changes are shared and understood.

**Briefings:** Appropriate briefings (SMEACQS) should be conducted when the situation allows.

**Radios:** Members must have a good understanding of the use of the radio's duress button, and know the correct process for making mayday calls.

### Questions for your brigade

- Do your members understand SPADRA, LACES and WATCHOUT and how to put these into practice to avoid being placed at risk?
- Are your members up to date and confident about being able to implement a burnover procedure?
- Can you implement different scenarios when training for burnover procedures?

### Conclusion

This case study highlights the importance of enhancing the preparedness of volunteers who find themselves in burnover/burn under situations, and how important it is to know what to do.

Simple prompts such as SPADRA, LACES and WATCHOUT are helpful and applicable to all situations. It's easy to underestimate the value and importance of these safety messages because we say and see them every summer. They are not just safety messages but ways of working that will help you and your crew get home safe. Please take the time to ensure your brigade members are fully aware of them and how to use them.

### Further information

Bushfire entrapment procedures for appliances – SOP 9.32

Mayday and hostile acts radio signals – SOP 9.15

Emergency evacuation signal – SOP 9.37

LACES (Lookouts, Awareness, Communications, Escape Routes, Safety Zones) – SOP 11.13

SPADRA

WATCHOUT (Weather, Actions, Try out, Communicate, Hazards, Observe, Understand, Think)

We encourage all members to discuss this incident and case study within your brigade to understand how it might apply to you.

If you have any lessons to share email

[lessons-management-centre@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:lessons-management-centre@cfa.vic.gov.au)



# Building interstate relationships

**In November 2023, Bulla Fire Brigade members, including Captain Elvis Crook, were part of a strike team that travelled to Gladstone, Queensland, to relieve exhausted local firefighters.**

While on a fireline at Mirriamvale, the CFA members met Tracy Kierys and Helen Randall, members of the Rural Fire Service Queensland, who were checking out the fire before liaising with the community.

“We made an instant connection with Tracy,” Elvis said. “Over the course of a week we stayed in a camp near Tracy’s fire station, and she invited us to the Calliope Fire Station, about 20 kilometres south of Gladstone.

“Her crew took us in as their own, let us wash our truck and hosted an afternoon tea before we travelled back to Victoria. They also gave us a heap of Rural Fire Service merchandise including shirts and caps.

Tracy, who is her brigade’s secretary, community safety coordinator and a firefighter, was full of gratitude for the Victorian crews.

“We had been on the fireground for 26 days straight with no breaks,” Tracy said. “The Victorian crews allowed us to have a weekend off to recuperate. We were really grateful for that.

“We also found the Bulla crew to be engaging and we enjoyed comparing trucks and exchanging stories about fires.

“Since then, I’ve kept in touch with Elvis through Facebook and we often check in with each other to see how things are going.”

Elvis asked Tracy to get in touch if she ever planned to visit Victoria – which she did when she came to Melbourne for a holiday on Boxing Day 2024.

“We were happy to welcome Tracy and her daughter to Bulla Fire Station where they met our members, exchanged stories and reflected on our time in Queensland,” Elvis said. “Before she left, we returned the favour by giving her a CFA T-shirt and cap.

“What struck me most about the Queensland deployment was that although their volunteers wear different gear and use different equipment, we are all volunteers who put the community front and centre. And this shared belief in community spirit led to us developing a strong connection.”

Tracy agreed, saying “on the fireground we’re all the same crew – comrades in arms”.

While in Melbourne, Tracy has learned about Victoria’s planning tool EM-COP (Emergency Management Common Operating Picture) and is impressed by it.

“EM-COP is really good and I want to talk to my members in Queensland about it,” Tracy said. “It’s more user friendly than our system in Queensland and has more functions.”

Elvis wouldn’t hesitate to help the Queensland Rural Fire Service again.

“They were so welcoming,” Elvis said. “And I’m proud of our connection with Queensland. As brigade captain I emphasise the importance of relationships and I think this story sends a good message to new CFA members – support our interstate colleagues and develop connections.”

**STORY DUNCAN RUSSELL**



**Left:** Tracy Kierys (centre) with CFA firefighters Anne Greelish, Nick Webb, Rod Marks and Brad Newman, and Captain Elvis Crook in Queensland

**Above:** Elvis Crook, Tracy Kierys and Anne Greelish at Bulla Fire Station

# DCO tackles off-road course

The pressure was on as DCO Rohan Luke took on VEMTC West Sale's off-road course.

The head of Operational Doctrine and Training was guided in the cabin by VEMTC West Sale supervisor Richard Mawson, while Rohan's original driving instructor who taught him when he joined CFA many years ago, watched on from the Volunteer Forum live audience.

"Practical scenarios are extremely important to develop driving skills. It was great to be able to put the new driver training truck through the West Sale course," Rohan said.

"Even though I've been driving heavy vehicles since I was 18 years old, the off-road driver training track reminded me of how much I've forgotten and how important it is to keep my skills up.

"The rocky outcrop was challenging as you need to rely on a spotter. The water crossing was made to look easy as I didn't need to check the depth, and the downhill looks daunting."

To see how Rohan coped with the challenging course, watch the Volunteer Forum by scanning the QR code.

To apply for driver courses submit an expression of interest via the Driving Pathway catalogue in the Learning Hub by selecting PUAVEH001 Drive Vehicles Under Operational Conditions or FWPCOT3329 Perform complex four-wheel drive operations.



## Developing inclusivity

**In a significant step towards fostering a more inclusive and diverse environment, Marong Fire Brigade has introduced an Inclusive Meeting Statement that is read at the beginning of the brigade's monthly meetings. This initiative reflects the brigade's commitment to creating a safe, supportive and respectful space for all its members.**

The initiative originated as part of an assessment for a Certificate IV in Leadership and Management that 2nd Lieutenant Andrew Jochs is completing through CFA. Andrew adapted an inclusive statement inspired by practices at Ambulance Victoria, to suit the brigade's unique context.

The statement reads:

*"As we begin our meeting today, let's keep in mind our shared commitment to fostering a positive, safe and supportive environment across the Marong Fire Brigade and the Country Fire Authority. I encourage everyone to actively participate in an open and respectful exchange of ideas while valuing the diverse perspectives and insights that we each bring to the discussion."*

The initiative underscores the brigade's commitment to fostering mutual respect and collaboration, and was an opportunity to create lasting change. Inclusivity strengthens a brigade and reminds us of the shared values that unite us.

The statement has been embraced by the BMT and the wider membership.

"This initiative isn't just a formality. It reinforces our commitment to valuing each other and working as a cohesive team," Captain Michael Shay said.

Since its implementation, members have noticed a shift in meeting dynamics, with discussions becoming more open and

collaborative. This change has boosted morale and strengthened team cohesion, demonstrating the tangible benefits of fostering inclusivity.

This initiative is transforming the culture of Marong Fire Brigade, and Andrew hopes it will inspire similar actions throughout CFA.

If you are interested in taking steps toward greater inclusivity in your brigade, check out the diversity and inclusion resources on Members Online.

**STORY ANDREW JOCHS**



# Chance encounter 40 years later

**Two school friends lost touch after they left high school 40 years ago. But by coincidence they met again late last year in the Horsham Incident Control Centre during the Grampians fire, where they were both Level 3 incident controllers. Lachie Gales is now the group officer for Wangaratta Group of brigades and Peter West works for the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.**

"We were close from about age 14 through to when Peter left to study forestry at ANU," Lachie said. "I remember hitch hiking to Canberra to visit him."

Peter knew that Lachie was a volunteer with CFA, but their paths never crossed.

"We grew up in Wangaratta and both attended Wangaratta High School," Peter said. "My sister Wendy still lives there, so during my visits back home I occasionally heard about Lachie from her."

"When you have kids, you tell them all your stories of growing up and mention names from your past. My kids had heard of Lachie but never met him – like some folklore myth."

While Peter was deployed at the Grampians fire over Christmas 2024, he heard that Lachie was arriving on the next deployment.

"I was in the middle of running an IMT briefing with a room full of people. I looked around and saw this figure entering the room and I instantly knew he was Lachie – a kind of old gentrified Lachie, not the cocky larrikin but a responsible grown-up."

"I hung back in the crowded meeting room as Peter worked through a full IMT/EMT briefing, not wanting to intrude on his eyeline," Lachie said. "Clearly, he was a person that displayed empathy and respect and engaged people with a leadership style that impressed me from the outset."

At the end of the meeting, Lachie and Peter exchanged an awkward handshake.

"When we shook hands, I was struck by his height," Lachie said. "I didn't remember Peter towering above me at school. He still had plenty of hair and just as unkempt as it was in the 1970s. All I could manage to say was, 'Well, here we are.'"

"It felt weird in the context of this busy IMT scene. We were both swept away into IMT changeover, with him having to get his head around the current state of the fire," Peter said.

The following day, before Peter travelled back to Gippsland, he looked for Lachie.



"We shut the door and left the IMT outside," Peter said. "We chatted about family mostly, then friends and although it felt like I was speaking to a different person, the old Lachie was there as well."

"There was a formal, polite edge to our conversation but a curiously familiar ease at the same time. He was a totally different person. I realised I only knew a fragment of his story and experience but behind the glasses and beard I could still see the Lachie I used to know."

"I was really pleased when Peter reappeared in the ICC and suggested we take some time together," Lachie said. "We didn't get a long time on our own and I was struck by how much I learned about his life. He must have felt interrogated as I peppered him with questions. He was genuinely open and generous in the face of my nervousness."

"I've stayed in touch with a handful of mates from school and was able to talk about them. I married Beth, who was also at school with us, and was falling over myself to show Peter her photo."

When Lachie and Peter reflected on their chance encounter, to some extent they were not surprised that their paths finally crossed given they are both Level 3 incident controllers.

"One of the best things about IMTs is that you form strong relationships with those you work with and you are constantly running into people from past campaigns and reconnecting," Peter said. "I like the emergency management family vibe – but this was reconnecting to a new level."

"There's a lot of strength in our IMTs where a disparate group of people, all with varied skill sets and drawn from all over the nation, find themselves united in a common effort to achieve great things," Lachie said.

"Peter and I grew up in a regional town and our values were formed by that experience together. That showed up big time in Horsham 40 years later, as we found ourselves sharing the motivation to contribute at the highest level we could to keep our community and our environment safe."

**STORY DUNCAN RUSSELL**

# Fires caused by escapes and reignitions from burn-offs

**Each year, the CFA Fire Investigation Section produces a Fire Trend Report about the causation of vegetation fires occurring during the fire season. It also includes the key lessons learned which inform fire prevention messaging at state, regional and district levels.**

An analysis of the vegetation fires that occurred during the 2023-24 Fire Danger Period was done based on completed reports in CFA's Fire and Incident Reporting System (FIRS) database and the Fire Investigation Management System (FIMS).

During the 2023-24 Fire Danger Period, 387 (18 per cent) of the vegetation fires were recorded as being caused by escapes from burn-offs due to inadequate control of an open fire or unattended fire. This was the top cause of vegetation fires during the fire season.

Based on investigations conducted by fire investigators, the key factors that were identified relating to escapes from burn-offs were:

- burn-offs left unattended or not supervised
- burn-offs were started or continued when there were changes in the wind conditions, which resulted in the fires spreading to surrounding areas.

In addition, a further 202 fires (9.4 per cent of vegetation fires) were attributed to a reignition from a previous fire, with the initial burn-offs occurring days or weeks prior to the fire being reported.

Factors that were identified relating to reignition from previous burn-offs were:

- fire smouldering or burning within piles of vegetation materials, tree stumps/branches above ground or partially buried underground
- changes in weather conditions such as an increase in wind velocity producing conditions to promote fire spread into the surrounding unburnt environments.

CFA also looked at the cause of vegetation fires across the state on days that were declared Total Fire Bans. Ninety-six fires (21 per cent) were caused by unattended burn-offs and escape from burn-offs due to changes in weather conditions such as an increased wind speed.

From a fire prevention and community safety perspective, it's important that the community understands the risks of conducting burn-offs and the potential for escapes and reignitions.

Brigades are encouraged to discuss this important issue with property owners and pass on some practical advice to them to decrease the occurrence of fires caused by escapes from burn-offs.

- Check and comply with local council laws and CFA requirements regarding burn-offs.
- During the Fire Danger Period, ensure that a permit has been obtained to undertake the burn-off.
- Comply with the conditions of the permit at all times.
- Register the burn-off by notifying Triple Zero Victoria online, or by phone or email. Unregistered burn-offs can cause fire brigades to be called out unnecessarily.
- Continue to check and monitor the weather forecast for the day of the activity and for the days afterwards.
- Establish a fire break with no less than three metres cleared of all flammable material around the entire burn off site.
- Ensure there are enough people attending the burn-off to monitor, contain and extinguish the burn safely and effectively.

- While on-site, there must be ready access to an adequate water supply to extinguish any outbreaks. For larger fires there must be appropriate firefighting equipment or machinery on hand.

- The fire must be completely extinguished before leaving the area.
- Burn-offs are not permitted on days declared Total Fire Bans and any existing fires must be completely extinguished before the Total Fire Ban commences.

When brigades respond to fires that have been caused by a burn-off during the declared Fire Danger Period, and especially on days of Total Fire Ban, the incident controller must request Victoria Police attend the scene. Victoria Police will investigate and charge the person responsible for the fire.

Victoria Police and Crime Stoppers Victoria have launched a new bushfire campaign 'You light it, you own it. Any spark can start a fire'. CFA supplied information and statistics about fire causation to help develop this campaign.

This campaign is targeted at people who accidentally or recklessly cause fires on high fire risk days, so that they consider the consequences of their actions.

**STORY FIRE INVESTIGATION MANAGER  
NICOLE HARVEY AFSM**



# EQUIPPED FOR SUCCESS

Fire Equipment Maintenance (FEM) is a vital fire prevention activity and an important income source for many CFA brigades.

Story by Shaunnagh O'Loughlin

**Brigades providing FEM visit businesses and facilities in their communities, checking fire extinguishers, fire blankets, fire hose reels and lay flat hose, ensuring they are maintained and ready to use in the event of an emergency. This maintenance is legally required for building owners and occupiers.**

With more than 265 brigades and 1,350 accredited members statewide, the past year has been one of their busiest and most successful, with more than \$3.8 million dollars raised.

Brigades use FEM revenue to fund equipment, vehicles, tools, building works, training and cultural activities. It also supplements applications under the Volunteer Emergency Services Equipment Program.

We spoke to four brigades about how providing FEM services benefits their members and community.

## Briagolong Fire Brigade

Briagolong has funded a range of vehicles, building works and equipment through FEM services, servicing locations including halls, club rooms, petrol stations, hotels and kindergarten and day care centres - not just in their community but in neighbouring areas.

"We've extended the station to include a meeting room, kitchen, and toilets. We've also built a two-car shed and workshop. These spaces are used for meetings, training, and local state-run courses," explained FEM Officer John Hamment.

In the past two decades, successful VESEP grant applications have allowed them to extend their engine bay, purchase a small tanker and big fill trailer, and acquire new computers and electronic equipment.

"We have also purchased and traded our FCV six times, built a catering trailer and FEM trailer, and purchased generators through our FEM work."

Briagolong's FEM efforts began 40 years ago with about eight clients. Today, their clientele has grown substantially, reducing the need for proactive fundraising, though community contributions still bolster funds.

"While this is fantastic for us, the impact of FEM extends beyond financial benefits particularly when it comes to engagement on fire prevention," John said.

"Visiting so many and varied locations gives the brigade important knowledge of building layouts which is crucial in an emergency.

"Business owners often ask for home and fire safety advice while we are on-site, providing valuable opportunities to engage in fire prevention."

## Toolangi Fire Brigade

Toolangi brigade does things a little differently, employing a contractor to undertake FEM work on behalf of their members.

"When we first started provided FEM services, some of our stalwart members completed the work," FEM Administrator Ben Rose explained.

"Now, because many of our members work off the mountain, we just don't have the availability to complete FEM as well as respond to fire calls. By using a contractor, we ensure that local businesses and facilities meet their legal obligations and are prepared for emergencies."

The brigade has provided FEM services for more than 40 years, looking after a small number of businesses in Toolangi and nearby Glenburn. FEM is the primary revenue stream for the brigade.

"Our community is a great support to the brigade, however we don't do a lot of formal fundraising because we simply don't have the population to sustain it long term.

"Due to the small number of service addresses, we're never going to raise enough for a new truck, however we have used money raised through FEM to supplement VESEP applications, purchase incident lighting, wet weather gear, torches and other bits and pieces we may need.

"For smaller brigades or those in smaller catchments, providing FEM services using a contractor can be a great financial top-up and a steady revenue stream."

The brigade continues to receive crucial feedback about businesses and their fire preparedness through their contractor and members maintain strong relationships within the community through direct engagement.

"Although we're not performing FEM work ourselves, we maintain strong relationships with local business, our school and community, engaging with them about fire safety to ensure they are well prepared for fire and other emergencies."



PHOTOS: BLAIR DELLEMUN



**\$3.8**  
million+ profit  
to brigades



**267**  
FEM brigades



**638**  
qualified FEM  
members



**24,500**  
customers



**48,940+**  
workplaces  
inspected



**439,570+**  
pieces of  
equipment serviced

## Queenscliff Fire Brigade

“For us, the benefits of providing FEM services in our community are three-fold: fundraising, community engagement and situational awareness,” 1st Lieutenant Paul Hicks said.

“Providing the service strengthens our ties with the community socially and economically.”

After a lengthy hiatus, Queenscliff brigade started offering FEM services again in Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale in early 2024.

“We have used funds earned through FEM to upgrade or supplement our firefighting equipment. It also provides us with a solid economic base to finance any future needs,” Paul said.

“Delivering FEM also plays a critical role in our community engagement efforts, allowing members to provide information, address concerns and promote fire safety while on site. That direct contact gives the community confidence in our brigade.

“By visiting local businesses and facilities we also gain valuable insight into each location, its fire protection systems and potential hazards.”

Paul said that while fundraising was important to the brigade, members’ primary role was to protect the community.

“Outside of FEM, we only proactively fundraise when we have a purpose and it is always used as an opportunity to engage about fire safety,” he said.

“Every dollar we raise through FEM or donated by the community is invested back into the brigade to deliver the best outcome for members and our community.”

## Montrose Fire Brigade

“Offering FEM provides a great return on investment,” FEM Officer Michael Presta said. “It’s also an effective and consistent form of fundraising because you know what funds are coming in when, so you can plan ahead.”

Montrose started providing FEM services about two years ago, when Michael, who had experience administering FEM, transferred to the brigade.

“The brigade used to provide FEM but due to succession and changing membership, the work transferred to a neighbouring brigade. With the growth in our area, the state FEM team saw an opportunity to expand and asked if we’d be interested in taking it on. Our captain at the time approached me to get the brigade up and running again.”

With about 70 mainly industrial and commercial sites on their list, like Toolangi, Montrose decided to use a subcontractor for FEM work.

“We have a lot of sites in our patch, and given they are only accessible during the day, we don’t have the capability with work, life and family commitments to have a team trained to provide FEM.

“Using a contractor, we only need to spend about two hours a month administering FEM.”

While Michael supports using a subcontractor, he says brigades can benefit from doing the work themselves if they have the capability.

“You do get that additional exposure to premises and your community,” he said.

“However, our contractors provide us with invaluable feedback on our clients, especially if they think a follow-up visit is required.”

For any brigades considering providing FEM services, Michael said: “what have you got to lose?”

“Even if it’s only a couple of sites, it’s worth investigating whether providing FEM is an option for your brigade. I encourage you to speak to the state FEM team or a neighbouring brigade providing the service,” he said.

“The funds we raise boost our spending on equipment. Having this consistent funding stream also allows us to plan for future purchases, such as a new LPG flare-off support vehicle which is currently top of our list.

“Everyone in the FEM space is one big team.

The state team is always there to provide advice and help identify potential clients, and you open yourself up to a network of supportive FEM brigades across the state.”

Brigades interested in joining the FEM program can call **1300 363 661** or email **fem@cfa.vic.gov.au**





## Faces of CFA

KATE LAMBLE, KANGAROO GROUND FIRE BRIGADE, DISTRICT 14

### What is your CFA role?

I'm the 2nd lieutenant. In the past I've been 1st lieutenant and the brigade training officer. I am also a District 14 driving instructor and trainer and assessor for General Firefighter, low structure and BA.

### Why did you join?

I had grown up in a volunteer family with dad being a volunteer ambulance officer in the 80s. In those days the 'special phone' would ring and dad would race off and come back with lots of stories. I remember mum and dad doing a lot of bushfire preparation when I was a child, and my uncle was on summer crew with the then Forestry Commission. Then as I was finishing my Masters and wondering what I would do with my spare time, we were faced with the 2005 bushfires in Gippsland. That was my trigger to join CFA and I have never regretted it. I remember my dad saying to me when I joined: don't get on the back of a truck with a bad driver. He loved it when I got my truck licence.

### Who have been your mentors in CFA?

There are too many to mention but those that stand out for me are Di Simmons from Christmas Hills for being amazing and showing me I could aspire to any role in CFA, and Steve Riley and Clem Egan at Eltham for teaching me so much. Not to forget Pete Grant at Kangaroo Ground and Lindsay McHugh from District 14 driving, for believing in me. Many other volunteers and career staff have also been mentors and they will know who they are.

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

It probably goes without saying - Black Saturday. I was still a reasonably new firefighter and it had a profound impact on me. It taught me that you can't control much in those situations and that situational awareness and crew safety are paramount. I was on the Eltham brigade truck that responded into Kinglake West just after the initial fire front went through. I remember driving up from Whittlesea past the first burnt out car and thinking the occupants were lucky to get out. When we passed a third burnt out car on that small stretch of road I was hit with the reality that not everyone might have survived. That night was a steep learning curve.

The highlight was rescuing a scared and slightly burned dog who I handed to a police officer. Thankfully, the dog was reunited with its owner.

Many other incidents have had an impact on me. I love trying to learn something from every incident I attend.

### What have been the highlights of your time in CFA?

Becoming a driver educator has to be one of my biggest achievements. I never believed in my wildest dreams I would actually drive a fire truck, let alone teach others. Being an educator and watching others develop is such a privilege, especially those I've known since Juniors.

The connections and long-lasting friendships that develop between members is also one of my biggest highlights. There is truth in the saying that CFA is family and to work alongside people you know and respect is one of my favourite things, whether at local calls, training or on strike teams. Having been a part of two fabulous brigades in a great group (Nillumbik) also helps.

### How do you motivate your brigade members?

By doing. Not standing back and letting someone else do it. I love teaching and mentoring newer members and showing them what they are capable of. I also like to have a bit of fun and I think that helps. Doing things the right way is easy when you have a great group of people with you.

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

CFA does not have to consume you. If you want longevity don't say yes to everything! Pick and choose as there are endless ways to be involved. In turn, CFA can be a great source of stability when other parts of your life are a bit rubbish. For a time many years ago, CFA was the only constant I had. Also, you get out of CFA what you put in. You can dare to dream but always be prepared to hang off the end of a hose. That's fundamentally why we joined.

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

As a full-time working mum, my spare time is spent hanging out with my special people, my annual camping trip with friends, gardening and occasionally sewing.

# Developing a brigade's standards



**When Kialla Fire Brigade members wanted to develop core community standards, they turned to North East Region's Volunteer Sustainability Team (VST) for help. VST then presented a HeartWood Youth Engagement workshop to brigade members in August 2024.**

This workshop was originally created for CFA by HeartWood Centre for Youth Development in Nova Scotia, Canada to help CFA create safe and inclusive brigades for young people. However, CFA quickly realised that it applied to all age groups and all brigade sizes.

Kialla Fire Brigade Captain Jordan Stone (pictured inset in main photo) became aware of the workshop when he took part in the Captains' Peer Mentor Program (CPMP).

"After we did the intro session to HeartWood for one of our CPMP workshops, I approached Jess Skinner (VST) and asked if we could do the three-hour version with the brigade," Jordan said. "When I heard the content, I knew it was the direction I wanted the brigade to head in, so it just made sense to do it with this group," Jordan said.

The workshop was presented to nine brigade members as part of their usual Tuesday night training. One of the main components of the workshop is setting community standards, which are generally done as guidelines for the workshop to ensure that everyone has an enjoyable learning experience. Given that the workshop was for just one brigade, participants took the opportunity to set the community standards for the brigade as a whole.

Jess Skinner, who facilitated the session, said it was a rewarding experience.

"It was such a wonderful experience seeing a brigade that was really invested in progressing their team," Jess said. "There

were great conversations during the workshop and to see the brigade setting some community standards for themselves was very gratifying."

Jordan said the standards will help the brigade to create a safe and welcoming environment for all.

"Our brigade has been going through a lot of change recently, but having the workshop and setting the standards as a group with external facilitators was great for us. The brigade put a lot of thought into them, and I think it's helping us to create a brigade that is safe and where people can be themselves," Jordan said.

The brigade endorsed the community standards that were workshopped that evening at their November meeting.

"CFA has a lot of great standards and values but this was something that our people said was important to them," Jordan said. "By doing this we have started that culture shift, and everyone feels empowered to pull people up if they do something that is against these. I think this will build confidence in our people so that if a tricky situation arises, they would be able to address it then and there."

When asked if he would recommend the HeartWood workshop to others, Jordan did not hesitate in saying yes.

"The workshop is a great starting point to change culture in a brigade; it doesn't matter if you are the smallest tin shed or the largest outer metro-based brigade," Jordan said. "You get out of the workshop what you put in and I think it is really going to set our brigade culture so that we are ready when new people come on board, regardless of their age." If you're interested in having this facilitated workshop delivered at your brigade or group, email [youthteam@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:youthteam@cfa.vic.gov.au).

**STORY JESS SKINNER**

# Community safety in the alps



**The 2019-20 fires were the catalyst for Steve Belli's interest in community resilience and recovery. At the time, Steve lived part-time in Dinner Plain but wasn't a CFA member.**

"My interest really gathered momentum during those fires. I could see there was a need for more resources, more equipment and better communication between the emergency services and the community," Steve said. "As the president of the Mount Hotham Chamber of Commerce, I initiated fundraising for Mount Hotham-Dinner Plain brigade and we raised more than \$100,000 thanks to our generous community and people from afar."

Steve has been a local resident and business owner at Mount Hotham since 2012. He set up a snow park for families to do activities other than skiing and snowboarding, he does tours on snowmobiles and has a café and distillery at Dinner Plain.

Steve believed the public and businesses at Mount Hotham needed more information during a fire and have a stronger voice in the recovery stage. He participated in a Victorian Government initiative that asked locals for feedback about safety. This led to the formation of the Alpine Community Recovery Committee (ACRC) in 2020.

Community recovery committees ensure grants and programs are relevant to a particular community through a community-led approach to recovery. Steve was asked to join the ACRC.

"The ACRC is a voice for the community to the government to discuss grants, programs for mental wellbeing, and infrastructure that needs to be replaced," Steve said. "It also encourages emergency services to talk to the community."

"We helped to open a communication channel between emergency services personnel and the community so that the emergency services had a really good understanding of the issues in this area."

Historically, alpine resorts couldn't apply for recovery funding through the local funding and federal funding authority. Steve was instrumental in changing that.

"The resorts, lift companies, Chamber of Commerce and community members campaigned for change. Previously, alpine resorts couldn't access 90 per cent of grants. Now we can access 90 per cent and we have received about \$17 million funding for things like new water tanks, tourism initiatives and new infrastructure. That was a big win."

Steve is also a member of two municipal emergency management planning committees (MEMPC). All emergency services are represented on the committees, including direct representation of locals through the Chamber of Commerce or through the Alpine Resilience Partnership.

"When we surveyed our community, we found that many people didn't know where to get correct information during a fire and recovery, or who they should talk to," Steve said. "Emergency services produce a lot of information, yet the community said they didn't know where to find it."

"To combat this, we created The Loop – a community communications network. When emergency services want to reach the community, they send the information to the Loop. It is then passed onto community members through community connectors – they could be a hairdresser, a guy in the pub or someone of standing in the community."

"The crucial information is passed onto locals in a way that makes sense and that the community understands. It's much more powerful than putting up a poster that might not be read."

An administrator is in contact with the emergency services to make sure information is added to The Loop. Official messaging for emergency incidents is not submitted to The Loop – community members are referred to the VicEmergency website and app for information about current incidents.

As well as improving community safety through his committee work, Steve also enjoys doing face-to-face engagement.

"I want people to have a great and safe experience in the mountains. I became a CFA member in 2024 and I'm happy to sit on a truck and answer questions to the best of my ability," Steve said. "I help with community-based events such as barbecues and I enjoy giving people accurate information."

"I also explain why cars need chains on their tyres. Some people don't understand their importance and we want to keep people safe. There are two checkpoints on our mountain and a significant number of cars are turned around for not having chains."

When asked why he spends so much time protecting community members, Steve simply said, "if it's not you, who is it?"

**STORY DUNCAN RUSSELL**

# CFA's new website for Juniors



**CFA has exciting news for its Junior members and their families. After a year of dedicated development, the new Juniors website is now live offering a wealth of resources and a personalised experience for Junior brigades, parents and guardians.**

The website is packed with valuable content and a dedicated homepage for each Junior brigade's program.

The website was developed in response to direct feedback from Junior members who expressed a desire for a platform tailored to their needs. It aims to provide relevant and engaging content about CFA, offer a personal space for brigade communications, and ensure access to child safety resources and reporting channels to better protect young members.

The new website offers numerous benefits for its users including:

**Enhanced engagement:** By providing a platform for Junior leaders to share updates and news, the website fosters a stronger sense of community and involvement among Junior members.

**Educational resources:** With links to learning modules and other educational content, the website supports the ongoing development and training of Juniors.

**Personalised experience:** Each Junior brigade has its own homepage, allowing for tailored communication and a more personalised experience. Junior leaders can share brigade news, updates, images and other exciting information directly with their members.

**Child safety:** The inclusion of child safety resources and reporting channels ensures that the wellbeing of young members is a top priority.

**Accessibility:** The website is easily accessible to all CFA members, making it a convenient resource for information and updates.

Over the past few months, Junior leaders have already started posting news and links for Juniors to enjoy. Early feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with leaders praising the initiative.

"It's great to see CFA taking big steps in engaging young people," Grovedale Fire Brigade Junior Leader Richard Frost said. "The website is a fantastic resource for our program and sharing content with our brigade."

Grovedale Junior member Hamish Jenner said it's a perfect place to upload event resources.

"We used the new website to share about our recent camp. It's a great place to share our photos and stories of the weekend," Hamish said.

Fellow Grovedale Junior Koby Moores said, "I really like how the website helps me stay connected with my brigade. It's easier to get updates and news directly from the Junior leaders and we can see more information about CFA."

This new platform represents a significant step forward in CFA's commitment to engaging and supporting its young members, ensuring they have the best possible experience as part of the CFA community. The website's homepage and resources are accessible to all CFA members at [juniors.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://juniors.cfa.vic.gov.au).

STORY JEN CLEMENT



# Triple benefit of roadside burn

**Wycheproof Fire Brigade suggested two roadside burns on the Birchip-Wycheproof Road near Wycheproof township in north-west Victoria. Brigade members thought that by doing these burns, there would be a strategic fuel break on the edge of town, where reduced fuel loads on the roadside would allow firefighters to attack a bushfire coming from the north or north-west.**

Wycheproof Fire Brigade Captain and Planned Burn Operations Officer Corey Harrison could also see benefits for his brigade members' skills.

"Planned burns conducted pre-fire season are a good group training exercise to get everyone out, brush up on skills, and check trucks on a fireground so any problems identified can be fixed by district mechanical officers before the fire season," Corey said.

"A burn along Calder Highway was completed a year or so before the Birchip-Wycheproof Road burn. This generated strong interest from within the brigade and surrounding brigades and motivated us to look at doing the other roadsides."

Brigades from the surrounding areas of Swan Hill, Lake Boga and Charlton Group, Teddywaddy and Tyrell Group, and supported by the Donald Bulk Water Truck (providing water on-site to reduce water refill turnaround times) all helped when the northern side of Birchip – Wycheproof Road was burnt in early December 2023.

Corey also mentioned that a previous burn on the Calder Highway led to some negative feedback from locals because of the weeds that emerged after the burn. This can be an unfortunate, and not uncommon, outcome in degraded grassy ecosystems. When this can be foreseen, CFA carries out post-burn weed control.

"In the Birchip-Wycheproof Road burn, we received good feedback from locals who encouraged burning further along the roadside," Corey said.

Motivated by this support, the brigade worked with the North West Region vegetation management officer to nominate a

burn on the southern side of the road in the 2024-25 Joint Fuel Management Program. This was delivered in October 2024.

## **Positive environmental impact**

If coordinating the burn during harvesting season when many brigade members weren't available wasn't already hard enough, Corey had to consider the threatened species and habitat trees along the roadside.

Part of the burn planning process includes heritage and biodiversity values checks. Where assets or values are recorded, protective measures can be applied to ensure the values are not compromised, damaged or destroyed during burning operations.

An on-site inspection at Wycheproof with the regional vegetation management team identified two threatened species of Fuzzy New Holland Daisy-bush (*Vittadinia cuneata* var. *morrisii* and *V. cuneata* var. *hirsuta*). These species are only found in semi-arid and plains woodlands from the Little Desert to Nathalia at a small number of sites.

The two daisy-bush species of interest can respond to fire in two main ways: existing plants resprout from the base (root stock); or new plants germinate from seed on the ground.

The timing of the first burn (December 2023) and the milder, wetter summer of 2023-24 resulted in a surprise flush of resprout growth and out-of-season flowering for both species. The photo, above, shows the growth of Fuzzy New Holland Daisy bush on the northern side of the road in March 2024.

The southern side of the road was burnt before the fire season in October 2024. The burn removed years of built-up plant biomass and, because of the dry summer season, by early February 2025 the roadside was still in a fuel-reduced state, ready to serve its purpose as a strategic break if needed.

**STORY JUSTINE LEAHY**

# New multicultural guide

Many CFA volunteers and staff members carry out valuable work with multicultural communities. To help our members communicate effectively with them CFA has created a new Multicultural Communications and Translation guide full of useful information.

The guide was developed in collaboration with the LOTE Agency, which has many years of expertise developing services and resources for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

Many factors were taken into account during the development of this guide, including community literacy levels, cultural norms, gender and age demographics, and data-driven language choices. This guide also gives recommendations about different translation techniques, communication channels, and best practices for content creation for translation.

We encourage all CFA members to refer to this guide to help create dialogue and material for multicultural audiences.

The guide has six sections:

**Know your community:** offers information and tools to break down barriers and data about Victoria's communities and languages.

**Translation best practice:** includes how to involve the community when creating messages, selecting the most appropriate tones and styles and using NAATI-certified translators.

**CFA in language assets:** explains how we translate our assets, allocate our resources to the 12 priority languages, and ensure that the translations are consistent.

**Language glossary:** offers translations of key terms and expressions used by CFA across 12 key languages. The words in the

glossary can be used directly in new content or can be sent to a translator to ensure our key words are used and translations are consistent.

**Translation guidance:** includes questions and information about how to identify communities, effective messaging formatting and best practice to develop URLs for translated pages.

**Translation services:** help to define budget, choosing the right agency, scope of work, etc.

Use the QR code to access the guide or search for Multicultural Communications and Translation Guide on Members Online.



If you have any questions email [cfacommunications@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:cfacommunications@cfa.vic.gov.au).

STORY NANCY THOMPSON

# A slice of history in Buninyong

If a picture paints a thousand words, Buninyong - Mount Helen Fire Brigade's new mural paints the whole story.

To kick off the brigade's community open day late last year, there was an official handover of the Merryweather room, including a mural depicting the story of the brigade's original historic late 19th century English-built Merryweather fire engine.

The Merryweather stands proudly in its own dedicated space facing one of the main thoroughfares in town in the brigade's new purpose-built station in Buninyong. Thanks to financial support from Community Bank Buninyong and inspiration from the Buninyong Historical Society, the mural is displayed behind the Merryweather and ensures that the story of this majestic piece of firefighting equipment lives on.

The idea for the mural came from a montage of a Buninyong streetscape in the local Community House. After much thought, the brigade decided that this would be a beautiful way to ensure that the story of the Merryweather was brought to life for future generations to enjoy.

The Merryweather was operated by 26 people. With only 12 brigade members at

the time, firefighters often relied on the help of bystanders to assist pumping. The fold-out arms moved in a see-saw motion, manually pumped by a group of people – four on each side in three rotations – to get water running through the hose.

The Merryweather, which was used from 1882 to the mid-1930s, attended fires pulled by a horse or by firefighters if the horse was unavailable or uncooperative.

With no hydrants or town water, water supply in Buninyong at the time was not plentiful so keeping the water supply up was a challenge. The brigade relied on wells and dams scattered around the township.

Sovereign Hill staff contributed to the restoration of this beautiful old fire engine in the 1990s by hand crafting wheel parts.

STORY IRENE KEATING





# MEUs can work for your brigade

**In late 2022 CFA launched a fleet of mobile engagement units (MEUs) to support our members when engaging the community about fire safety. Since their launch, about 70,000 people have been engaged in more than 700 activities across the state.**

One powerful example of how the MEUs are being put to work was the Summer Fire Safety Roadshow coordinated by South East Region Community Safety Brigade. This initiative focused on high-risk locations on the Mornington Peninsula.

Mt Eliza, Moorooduc, Mornington, Dromana, Rye, Sorrento and District 8 HQ brigades all took part in the day, engaging residents and visitors about a range of topics including property preparation, burning off and camp fires.

“The MEUs are really useful because they have everything the community needs; it becomes a mobile one-stop shop,” said Jamie McDonald, Second Lieutenant, South East Region

Community Safety Brigade. “It’s easy for us to pick up the MEU and head out into the community.

“It’s important that we engage people in their own communities and make it easy for them to talk with CFA. The MEUs allow us to do that more effectively.”

The MEUs are a fantastic resource that all brigades can book. Each region has a dedicated vehicle.

For more information about how an MEU can enhance your next community engagement activity, scan the QR code for resources on Members Online. You can watch a video, read FAQs and details about how to request an MEU. You can also contact your district community engagement coordinator or BASO.



**STORY ELLISA BOURNE**

## The health impacts of smoke

**Research by Natural Hazards Research Australia postgraduate scholarship students highlights the effects of smoke on the human body. Suki Jaiswal from the University of Sydney found that Australian firefighters frequently experience eye irritation from smoke exposure, which can affect operational capabilities.**

Suki’s survey of 337 firefighters across New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia found that 90 per cent of firefighters experienced eye irritation during work and for 70 per cent this continued after work. Eye irritation was also greater for women firefighters.

Of the 67 per cent of firefighters who often or always used protective eyewear, 55 per cent reported having to remove the eyewear because of sweat, fogging or another reason. In other words, consistent use of eyewear was difficult. Alarming, some firefighters reported that eye symptoms following smoke exposure caused them to close their eyes on the fireground.

In another study, Suki found that despite habitual use of protective eyewear, eye surface damage can occur in firefighters working at controlled burns.

A follow-up project will explore ways to aid recovery and mitigate the impact of smoke on eyes by assessing how effective current

eye care guidelines are and whether there are other ways to better protect the eye surface from smoke-induced damage.

Kiam Padamsey from Edith Cowan University found significant knowledge gaps among volunteer Western Australian (WA) firefighters about bushfire smoke hazards, as well as forestry firefighters’ lack of access to P3 breathing protection, appropriate laundering or decontamination facilities, raising concerns about their health and safety.

Exposure studies showed high levels of particulate matter (PM10) and volatile organic compounds during bushfires and prescribed burns, emphasising the need for P3 masks.

Specific environmental factors such as acid-sulphate (peat) fires and the smouldering phase of fires were linked to higher concentrations of harmful chemicals. Additionally, off-gassing from firefighting clothing post-exposure was identified as a potential secondary exposure risk.

As a direct result of this research, more than 700 WA forestry firefighters are now equipped with P3 masks. Recommendations include prohibiting home laundering of PPE and establishing workplace decontamination facilities.

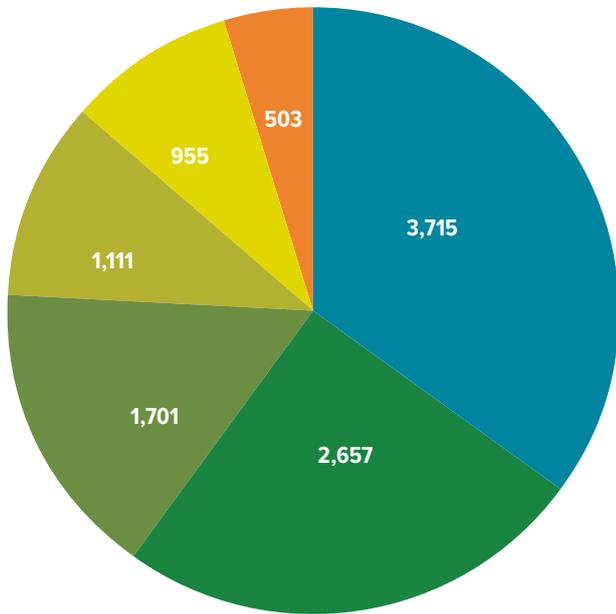
Read the full journal articles at [naturalhazards.com.au](http://naturalhazards.com.au).

**STORY JOANNA WOOD, NATURAL HAZARDS RESEARCH AUSTRALIA**

# Incident statistics

1 October 2024 – 31 December 2024

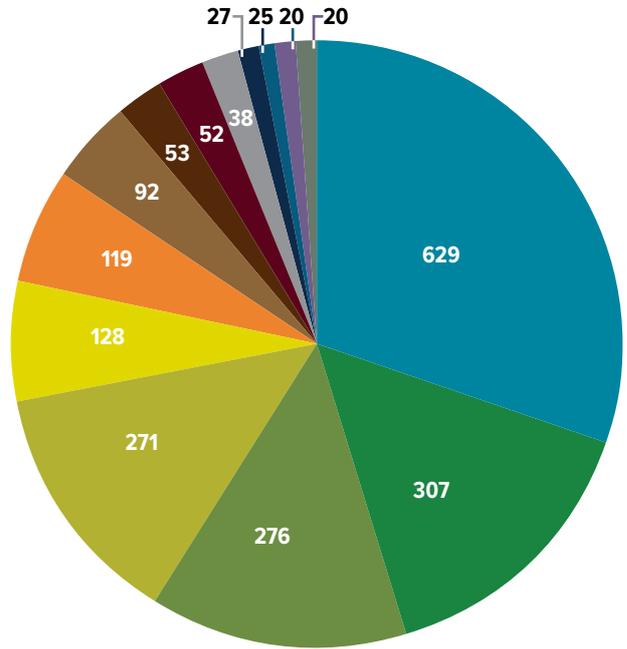
## INCIDENTS BY TYPE



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

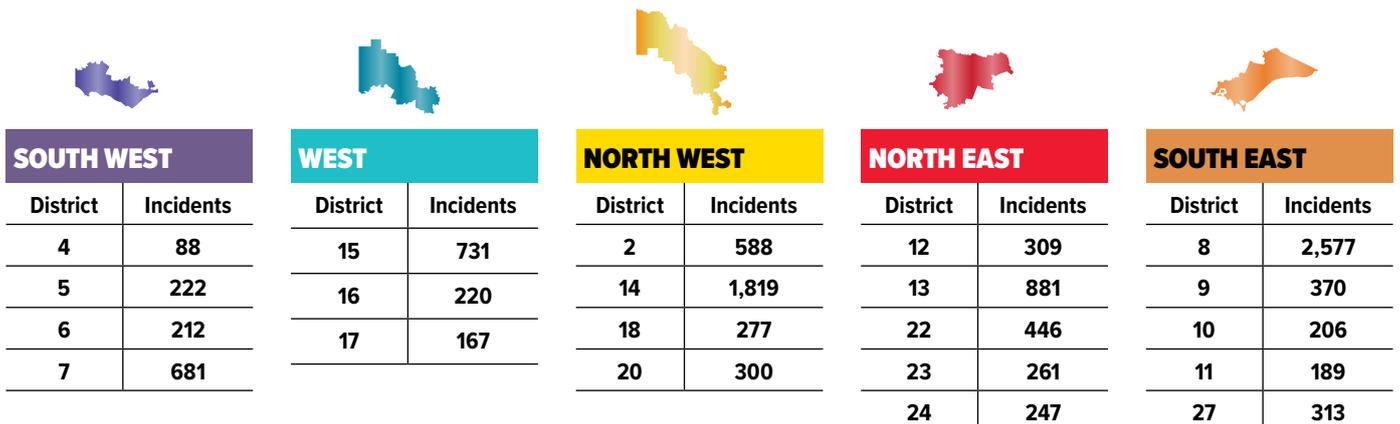
\* Includes 3,100 callouts supporting FRV, 14 supporting DELWP

## ORIGIN OF FIRE



Paddock/open area/lawn	
Scrub/bush area	
Undetermined	
Road/car park	
Engine area/running gear/vehicle wheel	
Area of a vehicle	
Kitchen/cooking area	
Garage/carport	
Crops	
Terrace/patio	
Bedroom	
Balcony/porch/verandah	
Storage area	
Switchgear area, transformer vault, switchboard	

## INCIDENTS BY DISTRICT



# Portarlington Fire Brigade





6



7



8



9



10



11



12

- 1 Current fire station
- 2 Training on Portarlington Pier, 2012
- 3 Austin Pumper at grassfire, 1970s
- 4 Brigade group shot, 1947
- 5 New station and members, 2019
- 6 Brigade structure fire training, 2010
- 7 Station and trucks, 1990s
- 8 Brigade Santa run, 2014
- 9 Discipline team at Bendigo, 1967
- 10 House fire, 1990s
- 11 Brigade members, 2015
- 12 1928 Dodge in use mid 1950s

# 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](http://emergencymemberlink.com.au)

To join Memberlink phone 1800 820 037 or register online at [emergencymemberlink.com.au](http://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.



- Plants, trees and garden products at wholesale prices at **Plantmark**.
- Corporate leisure rates and reduced insurance excess on car hire with **Avis**.
- Savings of up to 10% on **eGift cards** including Coles, Woolworths, JB-Hi-Fi, Endota Spa, EG Fuel Card, Bunnings and the Ultimate Gift Card range.
- **Flie Legal** has a free online consultation and 20% discount on current fixed rates on conveyancing, wills and estate planning.
- **Westfund Health Insurance** has a 5% discount plus two-month waiting periods waived on your Extras cover.
- Up to 20% discount on the public website price of **Lenovo** notebook and desktop PCs, monitors and accessories.
- \$50 off the already discounted price on a **Driver Dynamics** Defensive Driving Course.
- 15% off travel insurance with **Insure&Go**.
- **Isuscribe** offers an extra 10% off the listed price of any magazine subscription. Popular titles include Better Homes & Gardens, National Geographic, Gardening, Home Beautiful and New Idea.
- Members can enjoy a \$300 excess reduction when they have their car repaired at **Sheen Panel Service**.
- **Experience Oz** has 10% off and even more on hot deals on attractions, zoos and aquariums, Queensland theme parks and extreme activities.
- **mycar Tyre & Auto** has 10% off servicing, mechanical repairs and TCP tyre purchases.
- 30% discount on **pierre cardin** handbags, wallets, luggage and travel accessories.
- 10% off Australian car rentals with **Budget**.
- Exclusive discounts on home entertainment, audio, televisions, mobile phones, IT hardware, and fitness trackers through the **JB Hi-Fi Corporate Benefits Program**.
- You and your family members have access to discounts throughout the year at **Specsavers Optometrists**.
- **Sixt Australia** offers members up to 20% off the best rate of the day on passenger and commercial vehicles.
- Savings on **Qantas Club** membership via the Member Benefits Corporate Scheme.
- Special hotel accommodation rates throughout Australia and internationally with **Hotel Planner**.
- Members have access to commercial pricing on household appliances and electronics through **The Good Guys Commercial Division**.
- Up to 15% off the best daily car rental rate with **Europcar**.
- **RSEA Safety** offers 15% off full-priced items.
- **Village Roadshow Theme Parks** has discounts on a five-day Escape Pass, Australian Outback Spectacular tickets, Top Golf and Sea World Resort and Paradise Country Farmstay.
- Hire a **Britz** campervan and receive 10% off daily hire rates.
- Up to 25% discount on standard room only and bed and breakfast rates at **Radisson on Flagstaff Gardens Melbourne**.
- 5% on adult Spirit and Flexi passenger fares with **Spirit of Tasmania**.
- **Nissan Fleet** pricing and other benefits across a select range of new Nissan vehicles.
- Preferred customer savings rate on accommodation at **Choice Hotels Asia-Pac**.
- **Searoad Ferries** has 10% discount on ferry travel between Sorrento and Queenscliff.
- 20% discount on unlimited ride tickets at **Luna Park Melbourne**.
- Exclusive pricing on household appliances and electronics through **Harvey Norman Groups & Associations Division**.
- The **Bridgestone Business Associates Program** offers 15% off Bridgestone's website prices of the full range of car, SUV and light van tyres.
- **Infinity Celebrancy** offers a 30% discount off all celebrancy services including weddings, commitment ceremonies and renewal of vows.
- Members have access to 15% discount on the best available rate at **Quest Dandenong**.
- 20% off flowers from **Petals Network**.
- **Moonlit Sanctuary Wildlife Conservation Park** is offering members and their immediate family 20% off day admission tickets.



# Brigade

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

PRINT  
POST  
100010934

POSTAGE  
PAID  
AUSTRALIA