

Brigade

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cfa.vic.gov.au

Why the green drought effect is a concern



Fire Medical Response launches



Tom Gardiner's vision

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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

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facebook.com/cfavic



x.com/cfa_updates (Twitter)

CFA intranet:

members.cfa.vic.gov.au

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Community engagement material:

cfa.vic.gov.au/cecontentportal

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Summer 2024

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



Greg
Leach AFSM

I'm proud to have taken up my role as CEO of this great organisation, which has been part of my personal history at various stages across four decades.

I joined CFA as a volunteer in 1978 before joining the staff in 1986. This enabled me to get to know many volunteers and staff over the next 21 years as I moved around the state.

I have a great appreciation for the hard work, commitment and value which all CFA volunteers and staff bring to Victorian communities, regardless of the role you play.

CFA has undergone significant transformation in recent years following fire services reform, but one thing remains constant – volunteers and staff continue to deliver on their mission to protect lives and property.

My focus will be building on the strong legacy of Natalie MacDonald who, along with the Chief Officer and Executive leaders, addressed many of the challenges which face the organisation and introduced a culture of continuous improvement.

Along with the CFA Board, we will be working to ensure the long-term sustainability of CFA, and delivering the training, equipment and support that volunteers need to undertake their roles.

This is a journey which I am passionate about. I look forward to bringing my experience from across the emergency services sector, both here and interstate, to CFA.

As CEO of the Victorian State Emergency Service for the past year, I have seen first-hand how the "we work as one" ethos contributes to an effective and efficient emergency framework within Victoria.

In my first week as CEO, I was honoured to meet the members of the Daylesford, Hepburn, Franklinford and Musk brigades when they were presented with the distinguished Unit Citation for Service from the Chief Officer for their response to a tragic road accident, in what was truly a multi-agency effort that has touched the lives of so many.

This was one of two special events that week with Drouin volunteers and private citizens acknowledged for coming the aid of another member who suffered a medical episode while driving.

With fires already starting to impact Victoria, I know that our brigades are busy preparing themselves and their communities for what could be a significant season. I encourage all members to ensure that their physical and mental wellbeing is their highest priority.

Over the coming weeks and months, I will be meeting with CFA brigades and volunteers, staff and key stakeholders to identify how we can continue to strengthen the organisation.

I look forward to catching up with and hearing from as many of you as possible as we make CFA a great place to volunteer and work.

CHIEF OFFICER



Jason
Heffernan

Fire season is officially here and we have already seen hundreds of firefighters across the state battle fires in the west and south-west of the state last month. More than 2,000 hectares were burnt in two significant fires, and sadly one house was lost at Kadnook. My thoughts are with those affected communities and our members who have worked tirelessly on those fires.

The recent fires are a preview of what's predicted to be a busy fire season. The AFAC Seasonal Bushfire Outlook for summer was released on 28 November which further consolidates our concerns for the increased risk in the west and south-west parts of the state. This heightened risk has now extended to parts of the north-east, Gippsland and the Mornington Peninsula. It's been great to see preparedness activities occurring across the state and our crews stand ready to protect Victoria.

Fire restrictions are in force across most of the state now with the remaining areas to be declared before Christmas. While it's great to see communities preparing their properties ahead of the fire season, we're seeing a lot of escaped burn-offs due to people leaving them unattended or not extinguishing them properly ahead of increased weather conditions. We will continue to push the safe burn-off messaging across our various channels, but we also rely on our brigade members to continue engaging and educating their local communities.

I'm pleased to see we will have a strong aviation fleet again this year to help combat fires from the skies and to help support our crews on the ground. These aircraft will continue to be strategically placed across the state according to risk. Thanks to our aviation team for all their hard work, particularly with training and development.

I was proud to showcase our world-first mixed reality fire aviation simulation to the Emergency Services Minister recently, thanks to the incredible work by Commander John Katakouzinis and the aviation team. Originally invented by John in his garage during COVID-19 lockdowns, the project expanded to what's now a permanent state-of-the-art fire aviation simulator at the VEMTC in Bangholme. The simulator will improve the training and skills of hundreds of our members and be an incredible asset for CFA, Forest Fire Management Victoria and our other emergency services partners.

As we head into the peak months of the fire season, it is a timely reminder to take care of yourselves and each other. Manage your fatigue and ensure you're getting adequate rest periods where possible.

Enjoy the upcoming holiday festivities and stay safe.

DCO SOUTH WEST REGION



Adrian Gutsche

After 18 months as Deputy Chief Officer of South West Region, I continue to be amazed by the dedication of CFA members to their communities. They are always willing to lend a hand and undertake CFA services to a high standard. There are also many times when members take on additional responsibilities such as Fire Medical Response, hazmat, road crash rescue and technical rescue.

This work ethic also applies to the support provided by all staff across the various districts, region, Learning and Development, Community Safety and Volunteer Sustainability. It is a team effort by all, and you should all be proud of the collective achievements.

In South West Region, like all other regions, there has been a significant preparedness program of activities in the past few months, with various levels of exercises and briefings. These activities have been undertaken at a time when many areas across our region have been under immense pressure from below average rainfall over winter, which has severely impacted those who rely heavily on the agriculture industry. This situation has not been seen for a long time across the region.

I encourage all members to undertake skills maintenance in the Entrapment Drill, tree hazard awareness and firefighting strategies and tactics. It is never too late to undertake or practise these skills to embed safety knowledge.

The rainfall deficits experienced will likely lead to an earlier-than-average start to some Fire Danger Periods and cause an increase in fire behaviour. The AFAC Seasonal Bushfire Outlook for spring highlighted those areas of concern, which included the west of Victoria. South West Region has experienced some additional storm-based rainfall that has increased grass and crop growth throughout the spring period. However, Forest Fire Management Victoria notes that the bush has remained considerably dry across the region including the Otway Ranges, far south-west and Grampians forest areas.

For CFA, fire prevention, community safety education and vegetation management works continue and are increasing across South West region. The CFA component of the Barwon South West Joint Fuel Management Plan was fully achieved during 2023-24 and is well underway for 2024-25. These fire prevention and management activities remain critical to support readiness and response activities, and are instrumental in keeping communities safe from fire through prevention and education.

Please take every opportunity to look after yourselves and each other, including your families who stay behind while you are responding to incidents. The CFA Member Assistance Program is a great resource and I encourage you all to use it. Stay safe.

GROUP OFFICER, D10



Brian Minett

CFA is a remarkable and truly special organisation. Its greatness lies in the strength of its members and its long history. Although I only recently stepped into the Group Officer role, I've hit the ground running, embracing the challenges and opportunities with enthusiasm.

The Tarra Group, strategically located on the border of District 10, comprises 10 brigades ranging from Class 1 to Class 3, plus a coastguard unit at Port Albert. This region has witnessed its fair share of significant fires, with the earliest notable event being the 1898 South and West Gippsland Fires, famously known as Red Tuesday, which directly affected Yarram, Devon North and surrounds. More recently, the group played a crucial role in managing the Jack River Egans Road fire in 2014. This history of effective response showcases the group's resilience and capability.

Over the past six months, the group has focused on radio replacement training, ensuring that most of our brigades achieve the required percentage of trained operational members. During this period, the training team also took the initiative to conduct the Entrapment Drill and hazardous trees training on the same day. Doing this essential training has put the group in a strong position as we head into the fire season.

Looking ahead, we aim to accomplish several training initiatives including command and control training for first responders to better equip our brigade management team members. Earlier this year, we introduced a Captain's Forum to provide a platform for captains to share their brigade's successes and challenges. This forum has offered valuable insights, allowing the Group Management Team (GMT) to develop a strategic plan that targets some of the issues brigades are facing.

This plan focuses on three key areas: recruitment, a unified approach to General Firefighter training, and command and control development. The GMT is committed to providing additional support to brigades in these areas, ensuring they are well prepared to protect and serve our community.

Our primary goal is to offer strong leadership and unwavering support to our brigades, ensuring that we deliver the best possible service to our community, safely and effectively. Communication plays a vital role in our efforts and we're striving to maintain open channels of information between the district and brigades. We also serve as advocates for the brigades, representing their needs and concerns at the district level.

It's an honour and a privilege to serve in the Group Officer role, where my focus is on supporting the Tarra Group. I'm excited to see the group evolve and grow, paving the way for the next generation of leaders who will continue to uphold CFA's proud traditions and commitment to serve our communities.

Ten trucks boost driver training



CFA is boosting its driver training capability across Victoria thanks to 10 new driver training trucks along with additional driving educators.

In mid-November, the keys to five of the 10 new trucks were officially handed over to CFA by the Victorian Government.

Deputy Chief Officer Operational Doctrine and Training Rohan Luke said the new custom-designed driver training trucks will be delivered to CFA training grounds across the state to provide greater access to driver training without the need to draw on operational vehicles.

"These trucks have been built to replicate the size, weight and configuration of operational firefighting vehicles," Rohan said.

"We're one of the first in the Australian fire services to have purpose-built driver training trucks for our volunteers.

"Driver training courses are important for future capability in a brigade because they provide the key elements to ensure our drivers operate safely in high-risk environments while protecting Victorian communities."

The 10 new trucks, which cost \$2.2 million, can be used for both on-road and 4x4 off-road driver training as they are self-sufficient, containing everything the trainer needs to deliver driver training.

CFA recently offered the first women-only Driver Educator Course (DEC) which six women successfully completed. CFA Commander State Driving Malcolm Hayes said this group of

newly-qualified women will soon be delivering driver training to brigades in their areas and across the state when required.

"As a result of this women-only course, we will have tripled the number of volunteer women driver educators in CFA, which is an incredible achievement and asset for the future of driver training," Malcolm said.

"While we always encourage any CFA members to undertake the course, we do find creating women-only courses provides a more comfortable space and environment for them to train."

Women driver educator and 2nd Lieutenant of Kangaroo Ground Fire Brigade Kate Lamble said CFA has a strong representation of women so we need to encourage them to take on these challenges.

"My motto is you can't be what you can't see. If we want more women to do driving, we need to show them we can do it and we need to get women out there doing it," Kate said.

"I want to help break down those barriers and empower women to become CFA truck drivers and educators, creating a more equal representation across the organisation."

CFA offers three driving courses including the driver educator course, drive vehicles under operational conditions (on road) and perform complex four-wheel drive operations (off-road 4x4).

STORY AMY SCHILDBERGER

New ultralight tanker

CFA's Fleet Engineering team has recently completed the finishing touches to the new ultralight tanker. The first vehicle off the production line was delivered to the State Logistics Centre to undergo final working group review, tilt testing and quality assessment.

"Through discussions with our volunteer, operational and district mechanical officer representatives we have taken the opportunity to refresh some of the design features of this vehicle." CFA's Engineering Project Manager Simon Tesfamariam said. "There were a lot of great suggestions which we have incorporated into the new ultralight."

The vehicle is now built on the new ANCAP five-rated, four-wheel drive next generation Ford Ranger. It comes with all the modern driver enhancements and safety features you would expect in a new vehicle, plus a 10-speed automatic transmission. CFA members only need a car licence to drive it.

"The main body features have remained the same, however there are several new enhancements," Simon said. It comes with a 500 litres/minute diesel powered pump, 550-litre water tank, class A foam system, permanently connected suction hose, and live hose reel fitted with 30 metres of lightweight 19mm hose.

"We have been able to include electric rewind for the live reel, making it easier to restow. The stowage list has also undergone a refresh as well as improved lighting."

The lockers, which now have hinge-up doors, have been redesigned to give more room for personal gear as well as helmets.

A crew protection system including cabin curtains and foam deluge system will also be fitted when the design is finalised and validation testing has been completed.

Fifty vehicles are now in production with delivery expected to be phased over the next six to eight months.

"It is a credit to everyone involved. We have received a lot of positive feedback from those who have had the opportunity to look at it," CFA's Head of Fleet & PE Danny Jones said.

Use this QR link to access a 3D virtual tour of the ultralight tanker.



STORY ANDREW WEBB.



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

CFA Pockebook app

Pocketbook app launched as a pilot in October to gather feedback, and will be offered to all members by the end of the year. The app is designed to give CFA members real-time access to essential operational tools and information, directly on their smart devices. Wherever you are, the app ensures you have the critical resources at your fingertips, even when offline.

Key features include operational topics summarising key concepts for incident response, tactics, and safety; standard operating procedures; calculators and converters for operational tasks; and contact information for members who have chosen to provide their emails and/or phone numbers.



Wildfire respiratory protection

We have been trialling and evaluating alternate wildfire respiratory protection products with selected volunteers. A report has been produced by the State PPE&C Management Centre which outlines the preferred respiratory protection types and provides guidance on the next steps for an open market procurement process.

The Learning Hub

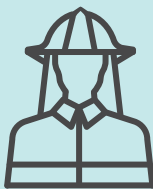
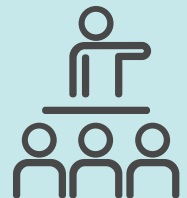
We have been improving the Learning Hub for volunteers and instructors. For admin users there's a new option from the app launcher (nine dots) on the top right of the dashboard. This Brigade Profile function streamlines the management of brigade training including creating and managing training drills. We have added new courses to the Learning Hub to align our training program with the new Training Pathways.

We are also updating member skills so they align with the Training Pathways and provide a more consistent, complete view of members' skills. This will be particularly beneficial for brigades that use the Brigade Capability Profiling App. Training endorsements will be collected and recorded in the Learning Hub and available to view on members' skills profile.



Volunteer leadership development (VLD)

We are building and enhancing our volunteers' leadership skills by delivering a suite of interconnected, fit-for-purpose leadership development opportunities. We are expanding Women's Challenge Camps to more regions across the state and are identifying appropriate locations and activities to launch camps in 2025. Work continues to develop the Young Adults Mentoring Program for launch in 2025. We are also finalising options to expand courses in the Leadership Essentials pathway.



Next generation wildfire PPC

About 24,000 operational volunteers will receive the new wildfire PPC.

CFA has received 15,700 orders and distributed garments to more than 14,500 members in 1,114 brigades. Velcro name badges have been ordered to replace the blank name badges. The rollout continues.



Drone trial takes off



After years of meticulous planning CFA is embarking on a trial to incorporate Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) into our firefighting and intelligence arsenal.

In September 2024, CFA received official authorisation from the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) to operate drones as part of our operations. Our Remote Operators Certificate, issued by CASA, along with our detailed operations manual, allows us to legally use drones within our and partner agencies' operations.

The CFA RPAS unit will initially be trialled at Rowville, Edithvale and Bangholme for 12 months. Following this period, assuming we demonstrate the effectiveness of drones in supporting firefighters and enhancing our operational efficiency, we look forward to deploying these advanced tools across the state.

"I am optimistic about the integration of drones into our operations," CFA Commander and Manager Aviation John Katakouzinos AFSM said. "They will complement our existing crewed aircraft operations and provide numerous benefits such as improved situational awareness and strategic advantage in emergency and firefighting efforts."

CFA's dedicated pilots have been vigorously training to exceed the stringent standards set for CFA RPAS operation. Each pilot undergoes CASA-approved training followed by specialised emergency services training, ensuring they are equipped to collaborate effectively with CFA and other emergency services as needed. We are also working closely with the Fire Rescue Victoria RPAS unit to align our systems, procedures and assessments.

Drones will serve as a critical resource, offering invaluable insights to incident controllers and firefighters. They will operate in challenging environments, providing real-time assessments of incidents. With the capability to share live footage, our RPAS units will facilitate communication across vast distances.

The operational scope for our drones spans various applications, including bushfire mapping and evaluating fire fronts, structure



fire, directing water spray, hotspot inspections, planned burn monitoring, Hazmat incidents, fire investigations, search and rescue operations, and more.

During the 12-month trial, two types of drone will be deployed:

- The DJI Matrice 30T is equipped with a wide-angle camera, a 48MP zoom camera, a thermal camera, a 1,200-metre laser range finder, a detachable light and speaker unit.
- The DJI Mavic 3 Pro is a compact model featuring triple camera systems that ensure high-quality real-time imagery.

We eagerly anticipate the enhanced intelligence-gathering capabilities and improved safety that drones will deliver to our operations. Stay tuned – our drone team looks forward to seeing you from the skies soon.

STORY MEL LYONS

RESPONDING TO EMERGENCIES AT

Fire safety at large-scale renewable energy facilities is an ongoing focus for CFA



Message from Chief Officer

Across the state we are seeing the number of renewable energy facilities increase as part of the Victorian Government's sustainable energy policies. In some communities, this has resulted in protests and objections, including from our own members.

We respect the right of members to engage in conversations relevant to their communities. However, we need to ensure that we do not undermine public trust and confidence in CFA, and our capability and capacity to respond to any incidents at or near these facilities.

CFA has developed operational procedures for response and continues to review and refine these to respond to emergencies at renewable energy facilities. Our operational leaders work closely at a local level to ensure brigades and volunteers are familiar with any renewable energy development and given the training to support this.

CFA and other government agencies engage with the operators of renewable energy facilities about prevention, including appropriate maintenance, vegetation clearing, provision of firefighting water and the preparation of emergency management plans.

We have also developed Australia's first guidelines for the design and construction of renewable energy facilities.

CFA firefighters are highly trained to manage a range of hazards and risks when responding to emergency situations and have been doing so for years.

Please reach out to your local commander with any questions or additional assistance about any renewable energy facilities in your area. You can also view a video on Members Online about how CFA brigades are training around these facilities. You can use the QR code to access the video.



Fire safety is one of the key considerations for communities when a renewable energy facility is proposed.

CFA continues to update operational procedures for response to emergencies at renewable energy facilities to ensure our brigades are prepared to undertake response near this infrastructure.

Updated Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are available for comment and can be viewed on Members Online.

CFA's Specialist Risk and Fire Safety Unit (SRFSU) works with regulators and industry to ensure that fire risk management is considered in the design and operation of renewable energy facilities.

The CFA *Design Guidelines and Model Requirements for Renewable Energy Facilities*, developed by the SRFSU, contains CFA's expectations for fire risk management in design and operation, and have been endorsed by the Chief Officer.

What is CFA's role in renewable energy developments?

CFA has responsibilities for the prevention and suppression of fires which supports community and emergency

RENEWABLE ENERGY FACILITIES



responders' safety. The role of the SRFSU is to advocate that developments proposed in CFA areas are located, designed, constructed and operated as safely as possible. The SRFSU works closely with the regulators, designers and operators to ensure that renewable energy facilities are as safe as possible for emergency responders.

How does CFA manage risks to communities and firefighters at renewable energy facilities?

The SRFSU provides advice and recommendations to the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) via the provisions in the Planning and Environment Act 1987. The Act enables CFA to be notified of renewable energy facility applications received by DTP and allows 14 days for CFA to respond.

Through this process, hazards and risks are identified and permit conditions proposed to DTP to compel applicants to develop risk management plans, fire management plans and emergency plans in conjunction with CFA, to the satisfaction of the responsible authority (DTP/councils).

Where a permit is granted and CFA's conditions are applied, the SRFSU proposes specific control measures based on the risk profile. This may

include modifications to facility design, the provision, location and quantity of fire water supplies/hydrants, suitable fire vehicle access, fire breaks, vegetation management and the provision of emergency information. The risk controls are refined in conjunction with the SRFSU, which engages with internal stakeholders throughout the detailed design process.

When renewable energy facilities are operational, the SRFSU relies on districts and brigades to email details of fire safety concerns to risk-info@cfa.vic.gov.au. This enables intervention by the SRFSU and local council to enforce the conditions of the planning permit (such as vegetation management), or advocate for the issuing of a Fire Prevention Notice.

What about neighbourhood batteries?

There is no formal planning mechanism for CFA to be notified about proposed neighbourhood (community) batteries. CFA encourages neighbourhood battery proponents and owners to engage with the SRFSU to ensure that fire safety and safe emergency response is considered in the design and operation. If you become aware that a neighbourhood battery is planned in your area, please advise the SRFSU at risk-info@cfa.vic.gov.au so

that we can reach out and ensure that CFA's *Fire Risk Management Advice for Neighbourhood Battery Energy Storage Systems* information is provided.

High voltage transmission lines

After renewable energy has been generated it needs to travel from the facility to the community that uses this power. Renewable energy facilities will operate in areas that do not currently have transmission lines, and this will require new transmission lines to be constructed. The Victorian Government has established a technical reference group for each of the transmission line projects. The groups will consider the risks associated with these projects and provide advice and recommendations to the government. CFA is a member of each group and will advise the project about bushfire risk in the area.

How do I know if CFA has been involved in the planning and design of a renewable energy facility in my area?

The SRFSU has developed a Members Online page that details CFA's involvement in renewable energy facility planning, design and consultation. Search renewable energy to find the page. You can also email risk-info@cfa.vic.gov.au for more information.

Radio replacement continues

CFA's Radio Replacement Program is currently being implemented through a phased rollout to all our districts. This initiative will replace the outdated Tait TM/TP9100 radios, including mobile, portable, bag radios and local bases, across the next 12 months. The program is also funding a significant number of extra radios to greatly enhance CFA's capability.

The new Motorola radios will provide a technology upgrade, with improved features and functionality.

District Communications Plans will be reviewed with the aim of increasing the use of RMR channels. This will enable better tracking of CFA's vehicle movements on the fireground and provide more reliable communications.

Training to use the new radios is being delivered by CFA train the trainer approved members. There is also an elearning module on the Learning Hub. Following training, you will:

- understand the capabilities of the Motorola radios
- know how to navigate the various menu and button functions
- be able to replace, recharge and recalibrate the batteries
- refresh your knowledge of the RMR network's capabilities.

These are the major program highlights.

- The mobile radio installers are currently active in districts 7, 8, 13, 14 and 15
- More than 600 mobile installations across all active districts have been completed
- About 4,600 portables have been rolled out across districts 2, 5, 7, 8, 13, 14 and 15
- 14 districts have completed training, and districts 12 and 23 commenced training in December
- more than 11,000 members have completed training either through the online module or face-to-face sessions.

Several years ago, CFA introduced an application to facilitate live tracking of CFA vehicles equipped with a Tait mobile radio and connected GPS antenna. This provided real-time monitoring of the location of vehicles on the fireground. The data for tracking



vehicles is primarily provided via operational radios through the RMR network. This will continue with the new radios.

With the introduction of new CFA radios, there are impacts on the systems that support data flow into the application. This will require changes to supporting equipment and data management processes which are currently being undertaken. There may be gaps in tracking vehicles until the new supporting solution is rolled out. The increased use of the RMR channels will help our vehicles to remain visible on our tracking applications.

As part of the Radio Replacement Program, CFA has formed a partnership with Waverley Social Enterprises to refit and repackage more than 1,600 bag radios. Waverley Social Enterprises is a certified social trader that provides employment opportunities for people with a disability.

Waverley also has a longstanding partnership with CFA to provide daily catering to Bangholme training campus. Scan the QR code to watch a video about Waverley.



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World-first fire aviation simulator launched



CFA has created a world-first mixed reality fire aviation simulator which will improve the training and skills of hundreds of the state's eyes in the skies.

The aviation simulator has state-of-the-art mixed reality goggles with a 280-degree view of the surrounding landscape, providing real-world training and skill testing in a safe, controlled environment.

"Traditionally, we trained our firefighters in crewed aircraft. That's a big expense and a safety issue when we're flying," CFA Aviation Commander John Katakouzinos AFSM said. "The simulator allows all-year, all-weather training at any time of the day."

The simulator was officially launched in early October at the Victorian Emergency Management Training Centre at Bangholme by Emergency Services Minister Jaclyn Symes alongside CFA Chief Officer Jason Heffernan, Forest Fire Management Victoria Deputy Chief Fire Officer Fiona Dunstan and aviation specialists.

The \$640,000 project was jointly funded by CFA and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.

A prototype trailer of the aviation simulator was originally designed and developed by John, who started the project in his garage during the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020. This trailer-based prototype is still being used by aviation members across the state.

John said the need for a permanent aviation simulator became evident following the success of the prototype.

"The simulator allows aviation volunteers and staff to undertake mapping, air attack missions, direct aircraft and practise communication and radio skills in a simulated environment," John said.

"It replicates the interior of an aircraft and uses photo-realistic mapping software and communication technology to immerse pilots and students in the flight experience.

"What makes this simulator different from others around the world is that it has see-through technology. This allows our air crews to read their map books, look at tablets and manipulate radios. As they look out of the window they see the virtual world.

"It's also designed to be programmed to train students in any scenario in any of the aircraft used for aerial firefighting in Australia, including re-enacting past operations for pre-season training."

More than 300 people have successfully been trained or reaccredited over the past few years using the prototype and new permanent aviation simulator, including air attack supervisors, air observers and airborne mission commanders.

CFA Chief Officer Jason Heffernan commended John and everyone who worked hard to develop this world-first technology.

"The new aviation simulator at Bangholme as well as the existing simulator trailer are vital assets for aviation training across Victoria," Jason said. "Aviation is important for providing intelligence and support to our crews on the ground during a fire and we're excited to be able to share this simulator with our partner agencies."

There has already been further interest from our airborne partners, and a portable aviation trailer being built for NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service.

STORY AMY SCHILDBERGER

FIRE MEDICAL RESPONSE GOES LIVE

Following two years of work to build the Fire Medical Response Program, the first nine FMR brigades recently became operational.

Story by Fiona Macken

The first nine brigades have completed a comprehensive vaccination program, and online theory training followed by face-to-face workshop training run by both Ambulance Victoria (AV) and CFA.

Fire Medical Response was initially announced by the Minister for Emergency Services in mid-2022. Since that time, CFA and AV have built an interagency team which has worked closely to build the program. The FMR team identified locations where the need for the service was greatest based on several factors including AV case load, brigade service delivery standards, and community demographic factors.

CFA consulted with many brigades around Victoria, with a further seven districts to be completed. Ultimately, the FMR Program will operate in 50 brigades from all corners of the state. Operational staff, PTA staff and Wellbeing team members in each district have also been consulted.

The primary objective of FMR is to train and equip CFA members to respond to cardiac arrest cases in their local community. Training includes online training (both AV and CFA online theory training), followed by two days of workshop training with AV and one day of workshop training with CFA. Brigades also receive continuing education each quarter with AV. FMR is similar to the Emergency Medical Response (EMR) Program which CFA has been participating in since 2007. However, the focus for FMR is more specifically on cardiac arrest, while EMR brigades respond to some additional case types.

The nine brigades that have recently become operational are Huntly and Kyneton in District 2, Bairnsdale, Lakes Entrance and Orbost in District 11, and Euroa, Tatura, Yarrowonga and Numurkah in District 22. Euroa was the first brigade to adopt the FMR Program and the first in the state to complete FMR training.

“It’s exciting to be getting started in the program. The training was really good. It was challenging and there was a lot in it – it wasn’t like a standard first-aid course – but the Euroa members enjoyed it and feel ready to take on the incidents as they come in,” Euroa Fire Brigade Captain Damon Rieusset said.

District 22 Commander Pete Dedman, who oversees a number of the incoming District 22 brigades and will become a volunteer FMR responder with Tatura Fire Brigade, recently trained to become an FMR Instructor.

“Having done EMR for a number of years, I’m excited to see CFA’s regional brigades being given the opportunity to participate in a medical response program,” Pete said. “A program such as FMR will provide a lot of value to the local community and will boost cardiac arrest survival rates across Victoria. I’m very pleased to see the program becoming operational following the comprehensive and thorough training which brigades have been undertaking.”

Lakes Entrance Fire Brigade Captain Phil Loukes (pictured below left) was impressed by the standard of training.

“The FMR training program was excellent, with members enjoying both the online and face-to-face training days,” Phil said. “There was a lot to the training and some members definitely found it challenging, but we were glad to be so well trained for the role, considering we are responding during the community’s time of need in a new and challenging way.

“The training was engaging, practical and based on what paramedics encounter in the real world. The skills gained will assist us all in our endeavours to save lives in our community.”

The FMR Program currently has 15 Instructors who are all experienced trainers or assessors. Most of the training team members also have medical response backgrounds – there are several current EMR responders, some former paramedics, as well as first-aid instructors among the group. In addition, a number of these instructors belong to brigades that have voted to adopt the FMR Program and they will become operational themselves in the program in 2025.

Among the instructing group is Josh Caron, captain of Somerville Fire Brigade in District 8 (pictured above right).

“Our brigade has been keen to do medical response in the local community for a long time,” he said. “Some years ago we looked into the opportunity to adopt EMR so this is something that we’ve been looking at for some time. When the FMR team reached out to us to discuss the program, we were glad to see we were on the list. This is something we want to do to support our local community.

“The training has been very immersive and I’ve learned a lot of new techniques.”

Joe Myall (Phillip Island, centre of the photo above far right) and Brandon Crowder (FMR responder with Somerville Fire Brigade and member of Mt Martha Fire Brigade) are also part of the instructing team.

“As a first responder in my professional role at Ventia Fire, I’m really glad I can contribute to the FMR Program,” Joe said. “I can use my lived experience to help CFA members understand the challenges they will face during FMR calls, and I think I have a lot to offer the program and the members coming into it.





"I recently completed 'train the trainer' to become an instructor. It will be different for the community because when they call Triple Zero for an ambulance they might get a fire truck. But I'm sure they'll realise we're there to help."

Brandon (pictured right) agreed, stating that "as an Ambulance Community Officer, as well as an experienced CFA member, I'm excited that I can contribute to such a valuable program like FMR, and the direct benefits our response will have for those in need. I'm also happy that I can turn out with an FMR brigade and help mentor those just starting out in medical response."

"The FMR training AV and CFA provide is excellent. It is a clear and concise clinical approach to really refine our skills, particularly when dealing with cardiac arrest in a time-critical environment. I can already see how much our members have enjoyed the training and how ready they feel for their new role."

"I think the general public will welcome this new program because if it's their family member that needs help they would want the best for them. And CFA responders will be able to administer early life-saving treatment before an ambulance can arrive."

Following this summer, a further 11 brigades will receive FMR training: Hamilton and Port Fairy (District 5), Colac (District 6), Bacchus March and Creswick (District 15), Stawell and Ararat (District 16), Horsham (District 17), and Kerang, Echuca and Kyabram (District 20). There will be two more training blocks undertaken in 2025 (with 10 brigades training in each block), before the final block of training in early 2026. The timing of training relates to Triple Zero Victoria's Go Live date for CAD changes.

By the end of the initial training, about 800 members will be qualified as FMR responders. These members will respond to about 750 cardiac arrest cases across the state each year. It is hoped that the FMR Program will directly contribute to improved cardiac arrest survival rates in regional Victoria, where currently rates of survival from an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest are lower than those in metropolitan areas.



FMR Coordinator with AV Max Leonard reiterates the need for this co-response arrangement in regional Victoria.

"FMR is part of a suite of programs that can help improve cardiac arrest survival in the community," Max said. "Co-responder programs such as FMR, as well as widespread CPR training and availability of public access defibrillators, will contribute to improved patient outcomes."

"AV is excited to be working with CFA on this program and we look forward to the continued implementation of the program in the next 18 months."

STORY FIONA MACKEN

Ultra heavy tankers delivered



In a boost to firefighting capability for the fire season, six brigades in South East, North West and North East regions are the latest to receive their new ultra heavy tankers. The Victorian Government funded a new fleet of 29 ultra heavy tankers across regional Victoria.

The latest tankers to be delivered are a welcome addition to Hopetoun, Berriwillock, Watchem, Waitchie, Moorooduc and Wangaratta North and their surrounding regions, and build on the seven that were delivered to brigades earlier this year.

The ultra heavy tankers will improve CFA's ability to fight fires in remote rural areas with open grasslands because of their enhanced water carrying capacity.

Moorooduc Fire Brigade Captain Alex Jones said the ultra heavy tanker – which holds 10,000 litres of water (more than some of the aerial bombing fleet) – will be a great benefit.

“We don't have any reticulated water in our patch, so water is everything to us. Having those 10,000 litres on board makes a huge difference,” Alex said. “It means we have that extra water capacity so we can be on the fireground longer, reducing the need to leave the fireground to refill.”

“We've already been to a couple of fires where we would normally call for extra tankers, but instead we were able to use the ultra heavy tanker's extra water to great effect.”

The tankers also include a 100-litre A-class foam tank to allow crews to work ahead of fire fronts and for blacking out.

Waitchie Fire Brigade often attends grass and scrub fires during the fire season and members have been training with their new ultra heavy tanker. Captain Ross Bennett believes it will be a valuable asset for the local area.

“The north-west is full of open space and large grasslands, and in some areas we have limited access to reticulated water or large open water supplies,” Ross said. “Its water capacity is going to be nearly three times what we've had in the past, having worked with 2,000 and 3,000-litre tankers in previous seasons.”

“We will be able to stay on the fireground longer and two people will be able to crew it to put out a fire.”

Wangaratta North Fire Brigade Captain Mark Connor said the new tanker will replace a heavy tanker that was built in about 1996.

“This new ultra heavy will be an extremely important addition to the brigade and a huge advancement in terms of the built-in technology,” Mark said. “We currently have about 25 active members who have started training on the new tanker, so we will be well prepared before the fire season begins.”

District 23 Assistant Chief Fire Officer Steve Contessa said the new vehicle is a welcome addition to our firefighting fleet.

“It provides immense versatility in the way our brigades will be able to handle emergency situations,” Steve said. “It is primarily designed for use in grass and general firefighting where there is limited access to water, but there is also the potential for it to be used in an urban environment.”

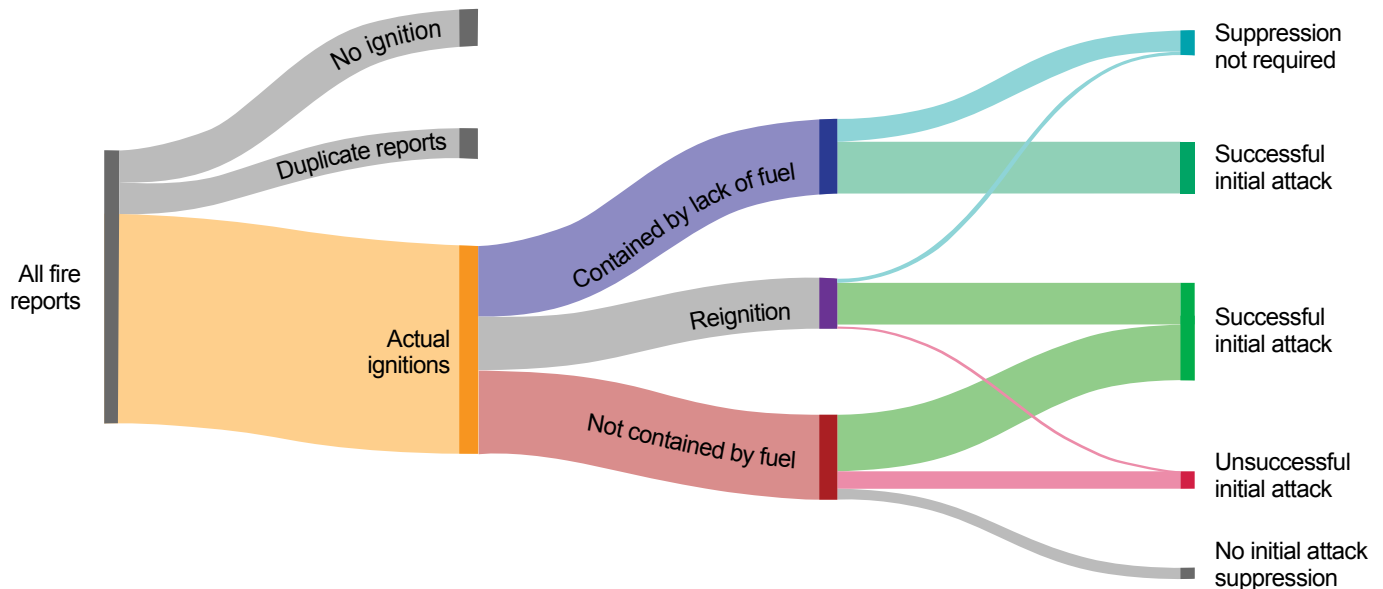
“We are aware of emerging risks in our area beyond the existing threat of bushfires and the new ultra heavy tankers will provide us with the resources to future proof our firefighting capability.”

Six more ultra heavy tankers are destined for the north-west over coming months, while two will be delivered to the south-west and one to the north-east.



STORY LUCY BISHOP

Understanding suppression on Catastrophic days



On a Catastrophic Fire Danger Rating day, what distinguishes the fires that grow large and destructive from those that are quickly suppressed? The fire spread and consequences of major fires on Catastrophic days are well documented and studied. CFA and other fire agencies attend hundreds of fire incidents on spike days – but not all fires require the same amount of suppression or the same response escalation.

Being able to predict which fires are most likely to turn dangerous on these days is critical to improving our state and regional preparedness and response.

“This project will enable us to build readiness and response strategies that are evidence based, which in turn will help us to protect lives and property on days when the stakes are highest,” said Deputy Chief Officer Alen Slijepcevic AFSM.

CFA’s Research and Development team and the Victorian Government Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action are working on this problem through the Suppression Effectiveness project. The project included a detailed review of all fire reports on previous Catastrophic days to identify patterns in fire development, suppression response and initial attack success. Our review included days such as Black Saturday and 21 November 2019, when some of the major fires in the 2019-20 season ignited. We collected data on both suppressed and unsuppressed fires, analysing information on response times, initial resourcing, access, fuel, weather and topography.

Our review found that the fires could be classified into distinct categories as summarised in the diagram above. Even on these significant days, about one-third of reported fires attended by CFA were contained because of a lack of continuous fuel, in locations such as traffic medians or garden beds where there was insufficient vegetation to spread further. Fires attended by CFA in these situations were quickly and easily suppressed, or in some cases required no suppression. Another category of fires were reignitions of either a previous fire or burn-off. In most cases,

these fires already had control features (eg cleared land or mineral earth control lines) around the fire, allowing for fast and effective suppression. Reignitions were particularly high on 21 November 2019, which was relatively early in the Fire Danger Period.

Fires that started in continuous fuel represented the final third of ignitions. There was a split between fires successfully suppressed in initial attack and those where initial attack efforts failed. We also identified a third category where initial suppression was not attempted because of concerns about safety, access or resource availability. Fire weather indices at the time and location of the fire were generally a good predictor of whether initial attack was successful or not, but there were some notable exceptions. For example, we found fires with low fire weather index values where initial attack was unsuccessful due to difficulties accessing the fire. Some fires in the upper range of fire weather index values were successfully suppressed in initial attack because of low fuel loads or continuity.

To a seasoned CFA firefighter, this categorisation and the reasons why individual fires do not develop into major events may seem obvious. However, to improve models and decision support tools, we need data to reflect the reality of your experiences on the fireground. Describing fires in this way allows us to have a structured dataset that can be used in modelling and analysis.

We can also isolate just the ‘close calls’ fires, and study the tactics, resourcing and environmental factors that lead to successful suppression in one case and not in another, and build this into firefighter training.

The team will continue to test and develop this categorisation of fires, with continued collaboration with CFA members. To learn more about the work of the Research and Development team, search ‘CFA research and development’ on Members Online. If you’re interested in discussing this research or other project ideas with the R&D team email bushfire_research@cfa.vic.gov.au.

STORY KRISTY BUTLER

NEW FIRE SEASON RESOURCES

CFA is again distributing its summer campaign material to the community to help people prepare for the fire season.

Building on the 'Can I or Can't I?' series that was developed last year, CFA has launched a new set of resources to address the strong demand for information about fire pits and other outdoor cooking. The new artwork outlines what you can and can't do during Fire Danger Periods and Total Fire Ban days, and includes animations, posters, flyers and additional online information.

We've also produced new photos showing how to prepare your property, including images of gutter cleaning, mowing, line trimming and other summer fire season preparation jobs. Brigades can access these photos to use in their communications by visiting the CFA Digital library: digitallibrary.cfa.vic.gov.au.

Many resources have been translated into 12 languages, which are available in the 'Fire safety translations' section of the CFA website. This includes new resources about fire pits and outdoor cooking and the majority of the 'Can I or can't I?' series of animations including camp fires, travel, barbecues and burning off.

We also have a range of other translated material including smoke alarms, urban grassfires and Fire Danger Ratings. These resources include simplified fact sheets, animations and audio.

Additionally, we have created stakeholder kits featuring our summer and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) assets to give quick access to resources for CFA members who collaborate with other organisations and the community. If you work with local organisations, scan the QR codes to access these resources.



Alongside our assets we also support the Victorian Government's 'How well do you know fire?' campaign, which continues to emphasise how everyone has a shared responsibility to stay safe and how unpredictable fires can be. As with previous years, this campaign started in October and will continue to the end of the summer with prepare, leave early and traveller messages.

There's also a new online fire planner which allows users to create an online fire plan that can be customised to their needs and shared with family and friends. You can develop your plan here: cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/before-and-during-a-fire/your-bushfire-plan.

All CFA assets are available to brigades in the 'Campaign resources' section of cfa.vic.gov.au/contentportal. Use your CFA email address to log in. Resources include:

- key summer campaign messages
- 'Can I or Can't I?' resources including animations, posters, social media tiles and brochures
- rural and urban grassfire videos
- a range of social media tiles covering topics such as haystacks, harvesting, burning off and the Fire Danger Period
- animations covering topics such as warnings, what you should take with you, staying informed, and pets and livestock
- social media videos about burning off, preparing, leaving early, campfires, and vehicles in dry grass
- 'How well do you know fire?' campaign assets including social media tiles and videos.

Visit the Summer Fire Season Campaign page on Members Online to learn more about our campaigns.

STORY NANCY THOMPSON



QUARTERLY OPERATIONAL UPDATE



Chief Officer's message for summer

Most of Victoria has entered the Fire Danger Period and we are already observing brigades responding to a number of fires and escaped burn-offs in the natural environment typical of a spring season. We will likely see a further increase in brigade operational activity, so it is important to remind members of seasonal preparedness requirements, my expectations and, above all, the need to maintain safety and look after yourselves.

My expectations are unchanged and as follows:

- Everyone comes home, every time, safely.
- All members responding during the summer bushfire season must have currency in:
 - the safety requirements of Minimum Skills/General Firefighter
 - the annual Entrapment Drill as per SOP 9.32
 - tree hazard awareness training.

The safety of our people is my highest priority, and as always it is crucial to embody our values at all times you are representing CFA. Whether you are on a local fireground, on a deployment or at brigade training, it is important for our members to maintain the behavioural standards and display our values, even when operating in high-pressure, stressful environments.

This edition of the Quarterly Operational Update (QOU) includes a variety of information that will assist our members with preparing for the summer season.

Aviation awareness

Firefighter safety on the fireground during aerial firebombing is paramount. We outline key information about how members should maintain situational awareness and safety when firebombing is occurring. It requires planning and coordination, as well as effective and precise communication with the aircraft to prevent accidents and ensure both teams work efficiently together.

Fire and incident reporting

This information sheet describes the resources available to support members and brigades to complete incident reports. Fire and incident reports form a critical data source that provide valuable information about our brigades' operational activities and organisational performance. The information is used across CFA to record the effort and activity of members, as well supporting evidence-based decision-making and planning.

First on scene at a hazmat incident

This edition of our 'First on scene' series focuses on hazmat incidents. Incidents of this nature can vary significantly, from high consequence transport incidents to routine gas leaks. While they can be complicated and challenging, particularly for brigades that may not attend them often, there are principles and procedures that can be applied to every hazmat incident. We discuss these principles and the steps that should be taken within the first 15 minutes of arriving on scene at a hazmat incident.

Case studies

This edition's case studies include a wind turbine fire at Codrington, and the bushfires that spread through West Region in February 2024. I encourage all members to read these and consider the application of the lessons identified in their own operational response, as they can provide valuable insights from incidents.

Operational response this season

In line with previous fire seasons, the points that need to be at the front of your mind when responding to fires over summer are:

- weight of attack – hit fires hard and fast
- do your part to ensure information and warnings are issued to our community members so they can make informed decisions about their safety
- be ready, both physically and mentally, for a long season. Take advantage of the quiet times and support services on offer to all members, manage your and your crew's fatigue
- engage and communicate with your community to ensure they are ready
- confidently make decisions at all levels – back your training and knowledge
- work together with all agencies and at all levels: state, region, district, group, brigade and, most importantly, the community.

The 2024-25 pre-season briefing video discusses the above points in greater detail. I encourage you to view the briefing if you haven't already done so. It is available through the Learning Hub – search for '2024 Pre-season Briefing'.

Remember to take care of yourselves, your colleagues and your families as we enter the fire season. Seek out our wellbeing services if you need 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.



First on scene series



Responding to a hazmat incident

Responding to a hazmat incident can be complicated and challenging, particularly for brigades that may not attend them often. This issue of the 'First on scene' series discusses the steps that can be taken within the first 15 minutes of arriving on scene at a hazmat incident.

Picture this... your brigade has been responded to an incident involving a truck that has overturned. Reports indicate that a liquid is slowly leaking from the truck, which is producing gas as it comes into contact with the bitumen. The road runs parallel to a small creek, approximately 15 metres from where the truck has overturned. The driver has minor injuries and Ambulance Victoria is responding along with Victoria Police.

Determining priorities

The State Emergency Management priorities guide actions during response to any incident. The first of the priorities is the protection and preservation of life and relief of suffering. This includes the safety of emergency response personnel and the safety of community members.

This means that safety of members should be the highest priority at any hazmat incident, followed closely by the safety of members of the public on scene, and nearby community members.

DANGER

The 'DANGER' principle is used to maintain the safety of members at an incident involving a potentially hazardous material, until the material is identified and all hazards are known.

- D** Don't enter smoke, gas or vapour clouds
- A** Approach carefully, preferably from upwind
- N** No closer than 70 metres
- G** Gather information by observation (through binoculars where possible)
- E** Examine more closely, only if necessary, using breathing apparatus with full PPC
- R** Re-evaluate and consider options.

You should begin considering the DANGER principles en route to an incident if you suspect a hazardous material is involved.

Consider the weather, the route you are taking and the direction you will approach from, aiming to approach from upwind/uphill wherever possible.

Information gathering

Make the most of the time travelling en route to gather as much information as possible to inform your priorities. Firecom will usually provide any further information they have on hand, and you may request them to source further information from the caller if possible, such as the material involved, extent of the release, and any exposures – but be aware they may not be able to source that information in a timely manner. As you gather more information, this may indicate the need to respond additional support such as a hazmat vehicle.

Arrival on scene

When you arrive, resist the urge to rush in. Carefully consider where to stage vehicles and take into account the following.

- Allow space for supporting resources to enter, such as hazmat, rescue, ambulance and police.
 - Ensure you are no closer than 70 metres from any spills, vapours, fumes, smoke and other potential hazards.
 - Consider the consequences if the incident escalates or weather conditions change while you are on scene.
- Some other initial considerations after the vehicles are staged may include the following.
- Ensure that bystanders' access to the incident scene is restricted – this will include identification of hot and cold zones as soon as possible, with access to the affected area (hot zone) restricted.
 - Any traffic control requirements – Victoria Police should assist with this if on scene.
 - Whether there is a need for an initial community advice or warning message to advise them of what is occurring in the area and any potential actions required.

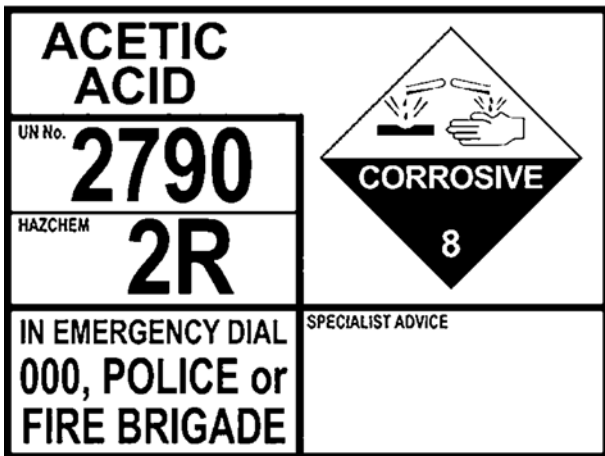
Size-up and identifying the material

As with any incident, it is essential that a size-up and dynamic risk assessment are undertaken. At a hazmat incident, members should remain 70 metres from the incident until required levels of PPC are determined by suitably qualified personnel. This means information should be gathered from a distance, ideally through binoculars, initially.

A key aspect of the size-up is ascertaining what the hazardous material is. Drawing on as many sources as possible will help to maximise your level of situational awareness.

- Identifying the material/product name and UN number is a critical step in understanding the potential hazards.
- On-site staff, the driver, or the transport company are good sources of information
- Use placards, emergency information panels or the vehicle manifest where observable and attainable.

When you are confident that you have identified the material, you can use the Emergency Response Guidebook to assist with understanding the hazards identified. This will also enable you to complete the Hazmat Action Guide (HAG sheet), to support you in relaying the required information to Firecom, identifying the correct level of protective equipment required, and the steps that can be taken.



As you complete your size-up and gain an appreciation of the incident, if you require additional immediate support or advice, phone the State Duty Officer (SDO) or Scientific Adviser.

Rescue

After your size-up and dynamic risk assessment, one of your initial considerations should be whether a rescue is required, and if it can be safely facilitated given the hazards that have been identified.

Where a casualty or exposed person is mobile, encourage them to move out of the contaminated area on their own. If they are unable to do so, you will need to undertake a specific dynamic risk assessment to understand the risks and hazards of the situation or material, along with the equipment and PPC you have on hand, to determine if a rescue can be undertaken safely.

If it is not possible or you have not been able to identify the material involved, you may need to wait until further information has been gathered, or supporting or specialist resources arrive.

Casualty management

Any casualties or exposed/contaminated people should be moved to a safe area where they will not be further exposed and can be appropriately managed. This may include the following actions.

- If there are any walking wounded on scene who have been exposed to the material, consider whether emergency decontamination is required. It is important to consider the mental and physical harm that emergency decontamination processes may cause.
- Generally, emergency decontamination would involve asking the affected individual to remove their outer clothing and using water to hose off the contaminants. You may make use of an emergency shower if available, clean water from a garden hose, or a hose line.
- Consider an appropriate location for conducting this operation to maintain privacy, and reduce run off exposure.
- To minimise risk of personal injury, ensure minimal water pressure is used and use woollen blankets to keep the casualties warm.

Notifications and warnings

It is important that the appropriate agencies and regulatory authorities are notified. This may include Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria, WorkSafe, Environment Protection Authority, gas & electricity companies, Energy Safe Victoria, the water authority, and Department of Health.

Following on from the protection and preservation of life, the next State Emergency Management priority is the issuing of community information and community warnings. Based on your size-up, including any potential off-site impacts, it may be necessary to issue a community warning or advice message. This is required to include incident information that is timely, relevant and tailored to help community members make informed decisions about their safety.

The SDO or Scientific Adviser can help you to determine the type of warning that needs to be provided.

Supporting resources

There are a number of resources that members can draw on to support them at a hazmat incident. This includes:

- Australian and New Zealand Emergency Response Guidebook. This includes a flow chart that members can work through to assist with identifying the material involved, and which resources can be used to identify the appropriate response strategies. This is also available through the free ERG mobile app.
- Hazchem code. This is an initial guide to dealing with a potential hazmat incident. It consists of numbers and letters to help establish an initial operations plan.

Further hazmat information and resources, including copies of HAG sheets, can be found on Members Online. Use the QR code or go to members.cfa.vic.gov.au/brigades-operational/operational/specialist-response/hazmat



Aviation awareness



Firefighter safety on the fireground during aerial firebombing requires planning, coordination, and effective and precise communication with the aircraft to prevent accidents to ensure both ground and air crews work efficiently.

It is important for everyone to be familiar with firebombing safety and awareness, because ground crews can be impacted by a firebombing load on the fireground either directly or by drift.

Firebombing safety

- For safe and effective operations on the fireground, establishing communications between ground and air crews is needed to create and maintain good situational awareness. This will help minimise incidents such as being caught in the drop zone and ensure effective use of all available resources on the fireground.
- The air attack supervisor and firebombing pilot are responsible for warning ground personnel of incoming drops from firebombing aircraft and ensuring they are clear before allowing a firebombing operation to proceed. However, sometimes they may not be able to see ground crews.
- Sirens on firebombing aircraft may be difficult to hear in a noisy environment – for example when vehicles, pumps or chainsaws are being used.
- Ground personnel must be alert and watch and listen for the noise of low flying aircraft, which could indicate firebombing is imminent.
- To assist in alerting ground personnel of impending drops, the pilots of firebombing aircraft with a siren capability will activate the siren prior to and during the release of any load.
- If ground personnel are near a firebombing target they must move a safe distance clear of the target area.
- On-ground firefighters near a firebombing target should be aware of the danger of material breaking or dislodging from trees due to suppressants and retardants dropped from firebombing aircraft travelling at high speed, and the turbulence created from low flying aircraft.

If you are in a firebombing drop zone

1. Move safely away from the fireline.
2. Do not run or panic.
3. Watch out for falling branches and debris – firebombing loads can hit with high inertia.
4. Place hand tools well clear of you.
5. Secure your hard hat or protect your head with your arms.
6. Watch your footing – foams and retardant can make the ground surface slippery.
7. If you are hit with foam or retardant, wash it off with cold water.

State Airdesk dispatch

Below are the numbers of incidents where aircraft resources were dispatched to CFA fires over the past three fire seasons. This does not include air observing, information gathering or additional aircraft.

- 2021-22: 261 incidents
- 2022-23: 197 incidents
- 2023-24: 267 incidents

Aircraft contracted to NAFC for 2024-25

Victoria has a total of 54 aircraft contract for the 2024-25 fire season. This includes:

- 26 fixed wing aircraft including bombers and Bird Dogs which are used for observation platforms.
- 28 rotary wing aircraft including Helitaks and Firebirds. Some Firebirds can be configured for bombing operations if they are not being used for air attack or observation duties.

Additionally, there are an additional three aircraft contracted by other Victorian organisations, including two with HVP Plantations and one with the Green Triangle Fire Alliance. These are not included in total fleet count.

More information

Firebombing safety video: <https://files-em.em.vic.gov.au/public/aviation/Video/Firebombing-Safety.mp4>

Aviation information on Members Online:
www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/aviation



Fire and incident reports – online reporting

Fire and Incident reports provide valuable information about our brigades' operational activities on a daily basis. The information is used in many ways and informs evidence-based decision-making.

The data is also used to meet our reporting obligations to the Victorian Government and partner agencies to enable further research in key areas.

The completion of incident reporting is legislated under Section 98(A) of the CFA Act 1958 which states that reporting must be completed within 48 hours. In 2006 the Chief Officer extended this to a 14-day requirement.

Since the completion of the FIRS Online project in 2022, the process for brigades to complete their FIRS reports has changed dramatically. The majority of incident reporting is now done directly by the brigades themselves. Consequently, the SDRC team has shifted its focus to supporting brigades to complete their own reports and performing quality assurance checks on the reports submitted.

Experience tells us that the best person to complete the report is someone who attended the incident. For this reason, we encourage the incident controller or crew leader to complete reports for their incidents. To support this, access to the FIRS Online system is available to all operational members and those holding key BMT roles. For more information use the QR code or go to members.cfa.vic.gov.au/incidentreports.



The SDRC team recently developed a suite of valuable resources to support members through the incident reporting processes. These resources streamline data collection, improve accuracy, and enhance overall efficiency.

- **Proformas for incident information capture:** SDRC has created two new report proformas designed specifically for brigades. These proformas will enable responding members to better capture essential incident details, which will improve subsequent input of this information into FIRS. We hope these tools will improve the transition of information from the field to the reporting system.
- **Comprehensive guides for common incident types:** We recognise that navigating the various options within a FIRS report can sometimes be challenging. To address this, SDRC has created multiple report guides covering the most common incident scenarios.

Whether it's a support report, a grass or scrub fire, a motor vehicle accident (MVA), a controlled burn, or a structure fire, these guides provide tailored instructions on completing FIRS reports accurately.

All members can access these resources through the SDRC page on Members Online (members.cfa.vic.gov.au/sdrc) or by using the QR code.



We hope that these tools will enhance brigade incident reporting capabilities and improve overall data accuracy.

What's next for the SDRC?

The phone still rings and SDRC staff still take reports, but they have also spent a lot of time working with brigades to improve their knowledge and ensure they submit top quality fire reports.

All submitted reports undergo a quality assurance check and any with discrepancies are reviewed.

We have also been taking on feedback from users and working with ICT to identify options to enhance the member experience. These enhancements aren't quick to solve but, once available, will further improve the usability of FIRS Online.

For more information use the QR code or go to members.cfa.vic.gov.au/incidentreports.

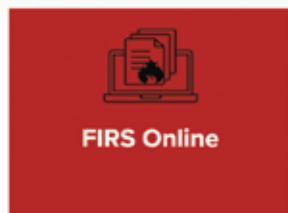


Statistics

Here are some statistics about online reporting.

1. Brigades can access FIRS Online at a time that suits them. Whether that be 3am or 3pm, reports come through all times of the day and night.
2. On average, brigades complete reports within 14 days of the incident 86.6 per cent of the time. Only 5.8 per cent of reports remain open for more than a month.
3. Since 2023, the volume of 'passed' reports has increased by 3.34 per cent. The quality assurance results show that brigades are becoming more familiar with the detail needed in fire reports and that training sessions and resources have been beneficial to brigades.

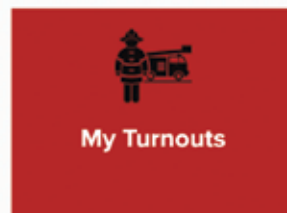
The statistics continue to show the fantastic outcomes achieved and demonstrate that brigades have embraced the technology delivered through this project.



FIRS Online



Protected Premises



My Turnouts



Report Templates and Guides



Codrington wind turbine fire

Summary

On Sunday 27 August 2023 a wind turbine fire was reported in Codrington. It was initially reported that smoke was seen coming from the wind turbine tower, so an exclusion zone was put in place to ensure the safety of on-site personnel. Members used a variety of resources and equipment to monitor the turbine and progression of the fire. The fire self-extinguished after the power was isolated, and after ensuring the scene was safe a multiagency fire investigation was conducted to understand the cause of the fire. After the incident, it was noted that the collaboration between CFA and other agencies worked well, and the local knowledge of members, Victoria Police and on-site personnel was used effectively.

Incident overview

On Sunday morning, the on-site technician attended the tower to investigate an alarm that had been triggered. He climbed the tower and found that the outer cover (called a nacelle) was full of smoke. The technician entered the nacelle and opened the top hatch which enabled him to see the fire. He quickly exited the tower and contacted fire services. Firecom alerted local CFA crews that smoke was coming from one of the wind turbines. St Helens Fire Brigade captain was first to arrive on scene and was joined by one of the site technicians. St Helens, Yambuk and Port Fairy brigades also attended. To ensure the scene was safe, the site technician isolated the power to the tower from the power grid.

The incident controller (IC) and site technician worked together to develop an incident plan using the expertise of the emergency management team (EMT), which included using crews to monitor the towers with thermal imaging cameras (TICs). Given the potential hazard and size of the turbine, an exclusion zone of 150 metres was also established to ensure the safety of personnel on-site.

A local commander was responded around half an hour into the response, and initially provided assistance over the phone by making arrangements and supporting the captain. He later arrived on scene to set up the EMT which ensured all relevant personnel were informed about how the incident was progressing and the requirements of the various agencies involved.

The IC's objective was to ensure the fire was completely extinguished prior to any personnel climbing the tower to investigate. This was achieved by allowing 18 hours without any intervention. TICs were continually used from the ground and no heightened temperatures were recorded. To do this, they compared the temperatures of the compromised tower with a nearby turbine.

Discussions were held to decide whether Fire Rescue Victoria's (FRV) RPAS (remotely piloted aircraft system) team should be called for assistance the next morning. Later that night the decision was made to request RPAS support and the team arrived at about 6am the following day. The large drones can hold their positions in winds up to 50 kilometres/hour and have a zoom and thermal camera. The hatch was open on the top of the tower which meant the RPAS was able to look inside

the structure and obtain a temperature reading, which included the drive shaft itself. The temperature and images were viewed live via EM-COP, though the image quality wasn't perfect.

To ensure the fire was completely out and the nacelle was safe to be handed back to the owners, FRV crews climbed the tower with breathing apparatus, a TIC and a gas detector. Before the climb, they were given a briefing on the layout of the tower, and they used the tower's built-in fall arrest system. Internally the tower had vertical stairs and four platforms; more modern towers have small maintenance lifts. As the firefighters climbed, they took readings at each level using the gas detector and preserved their BA air. Regular sitreps were provided to the crews on the ground.

Before entering the nacelle, the firefighters donned their BA and continued to take readings with the gas detector. Readings indicated that the atmosphere was safe, and examination of the area of origin of the fire showed minimal fire spread and it appeared the fire self-extinguished after the material in the area was consumed. Video and photos of the interior of the turbine were relayed to ground crews and command through a WhatsApp chat group specifically created to allow key personnel on the ground to communicate with the crew in the tower. This enabled technicians on the ground to interpret the scene and provide further technical advice.

After determining that fire was not a threat, the scene transitioned to a fire investigation and a multiagency team was established to determine the cause of the fire. The team included members from Energy Safe Victoria and CFA. The fire investigators were taken up the tower to the nacelle by a high-angle rescue team. This process worked effectively and the work completed by crews prior to the investigation ensured a safe working environment for investigators.

What worked well

Interoperability: The early response of the commander, who provided support and established an EMT, was highly effective to ensure interoperability between all agencies and personnel involved. The EMT included members from Victoria Police, CFA, FRV, WorkSafe, site personnel and municipal officers. Furthermore, interoperability between agencies was supported by strong communication, with CFA providing all the information required to enable effective support of the response.

Adaptability of local members: Given that this was a novel incident for crews, members displayed adaptability and forward thinking in multiple aspects of the response. This included identifying that the tower could be isolated remotely rather than needing to go inside the turbine, early calls for specialist resources, and effective use of those resources to monitor the scene and ensure it was safe.

Using the available expertise: All personnel on scene were effectively used, drawing on available equipment and technology, such as RPAS, to inform the resourcing requirements as the incident progressed. The incident required a coordinated use of knowledge including working at heights, fire investigation and electrical fires. Those on scene had the necessary expertise to contribute to the incident and fire investigation plan, which worked well.

Fire investigation: It was a complex fire investigation, which included high angle and several agencies. This was well facilitated with a high-quality investigation taking place, supported by a well-preserved scene and strong plan.

Lessons identified

Knowledge of the infrastructure: Understanding the differences between wind turbines is advantageous. For example, newer models have a detection and suppression system. This information can be incorporated into area familiarisation visits and pre-incident plans (PIPs). PIPs would be supported by strong relationships with site management to ensure emergency plans are aligned and key contacts are identified.

Note-taking: It would have been beneficial to have a scribe with the team to take notes as the response unfolded, rather than making notes at the end of each day. There is an increased chance of details being missed in end-of-day notes, especially when SMEACS (situation, mission, execution, administration, command and communications, safety) briefings are not documented. In a complex incident such as this clear notes can be beneficial to informing plans.

Community awareness: It is important to have a plan for community awareness and messaging during similar incidents. In this case, there was no plan as to how the community should be informed. However, community messaging wasn't required as the fire did not progress. Community advice plans should be connected with a PIP to ensure community members feel at ease with appropriate messaging and advice and warnings if fires escalate.

Questions for your brigade

- How do you ensure that the expertise of other people on scene at an incident, such as on-site staff or other agency members, is integrated into the incident plan?
- Are you familiar with any renewable energy sites within your brigade's response area, including wind turbine farms? Discuss with your brigade your response to these locations, including any arrangements to ensure members are familiar with the site and any pre-incident plans in place.

Conclusion

This was the first known wind turbine fire in Victoria. It is important that CFA members have a thorough understanding of how to manage these fires and what can cause them. This was a new experience for District 5 and all members remained adaptable when responding to the incident, and worked effectively to ensure safety was always prioritised. District 5 crews should be congratulated for their quick-thinking, use of specialist resources and efficient response when managing a complex incident.

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

If you have any lessons to share email lessons-management-centre@cfa.vic.gov.au



Significant fires in 2024

Summary

In February 2024, the Grampians region in Victoria experienced destructive bushfires, one of which was believed to have been started by multiple dry lightning strikes. The fire destroyed dozens of properties, primarily in the township of Pomonal. The cause of the Bayindeen fire, which quickly spread to Beaufort, is still unknown and under investigation.

These incidents were protracted and proved challenging because of the weather conditions, the size of the fires, and the resources required. There were several lessons identified, including the importance of early escalation, resource requests, and the need for clear warnings to assist with the evacuation of residents from towns.

Incident overview

On 13 February, calls were made to Triple Zero Victoria reporting smoke sighted at Mt Staplyton in the Grampians National Park. During the late morning, smoke was also sighted on the ridgeline at Halls Gap. Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMV) were notified, and aircraft support was requested for a better view of the area. By early afternoon, aircraft support was needed for deployment of fire retardant as the fires were moving through the Grampians National Park and surrounding areas, including Pomonal and Dadswells Bridge.

A significant number of resources were deployed to combat the blaze, including aerial bombers and numerous strike teams with members from CFA, FRV, RFS NSW and FFMV. Firefighters worked tirelessly to contain the blaze and managed to establish control lines around the fire, which had burned through thousands of hectares.

As the fire moved from the Grampians towards Pomonal the intensity grew. Even though it was travelling downhill, which is usually more sedate, the steep ridgeline caused erratic wind and fire behaviour. As a result of this, 47 homes were destroyed: 46 in Pomonal and one in Dadswells Bridge. An additional three businesses were also impacted.

Although the damage was extensive, there were no reported fatalities thanks to the efforts of firefighters and residents following published warnings advising to leave Pomonal early and head towards their nearest emergency relief centres. Eight days later, the fire was considered under control on 21 February. Crews remained on scene during the following days to ensure the fire was fully extinguished.



Almost a week after the first ignition, a second Extreme Fire Danger Rating was issued for the south-west, with temperatures soaring into the 30s and gusty winds reaching 60 to 80 km/h. Early warnings advised residents from several towns, including Amphitheatre, Beaufort, and Elmhurst to evacuate because of the risk of spot fires, ember attacks, and road closures.

While the cause of the Bayindeen fire is still under investigation, it was determined that the fire started in bushland nearby which quickly spread and began spotting up to 10 kilometres ahead of the main fire. A wind change later in the afternoon created a larger fire front, heading towards Beaufort, threatening communities and townships. By the evening, the fire had grown to more than 5,000 hectares. Ground crews were supported by aerial firefighting aircraft, including the C130 Hercules and the Boeing 737 large air tanker from NSW. The efforts of these waterbombers saved many homes.

Burning for more than two weeks, the fires were fuelled by high temperatures and strong winds, affecting approximately 22,000 hectares of farmland, residential areas, and state forest in the Pyrenees Shire. A total of six houses were lost in Bayindeen and Beaufort. Additionally, machinery, wool and haysheds and a significant number of livestock were also lost.

About seven days after the fire started, milder conditions allowed crews to bring the fire under control. Ground crews, heavy machinery and aircraft continued to patrol the area and assist with blacking out.

What worked well

- Significant back burning and control line consolidation around the Bayindeen fire prior to a Total Fire Ban a week after the initial ignition.
- Protection of key infrastructure and businesses in Pomonal and Dadswells Bridge.
- Early evacuation warnings issued by the ICC for the evacuation of Pomonal.
- Removal of impacted LPG cylinders from Pomonal.
- FFMV crews, with help from CFA, worked tirelessly across all the fires to establish, consolidate and hold control lines. This prevented further escape in the days and weeks that followed.
- FFMV crews did considerable work assessing tree hazards and removing trees to open roads quickly and allow safe transit of emergency services vehicles after the fire front had passed.

Lessons identified

- Earlier identification of buildings and properties that contained asbestos and impacted LPG cylinders.
- The need for effective sectorisation, good communications plans and the need to establish a base of operations at Ballarat to cater for the influx of firefighters and resources.
- Better liaison between divisional commanders and CFA resources. CFA Div Comm is a stationary position at a control point whereas FFMV Div Comm tends to be mobile. This presented some communication challenges when CFA resources were requiring tasking or dispatch.

Questions for your brigade

- Discuss with your members the difference between the responsibilities of a DCC and ICC at a significant incident.
- With the Fire Danger Period approaching, what would you consider your local risks to be?
- Given your town's layout, are there roads that would be heavily impacted by an evacuation?
- Given the layout requirements of incoming strike teams, have you reviewed your local response plan with your district office?

Conclusion

These fires occurred over a span of three weeks and placed considerable strain on brigades. CFA crews along with other agencies showed their professionalism and expertise in being able to manage these fires effectively while maintaining coverage across the remainder of the district. Their tireless efforts and hard work during and after the fire was deemed under control, clearly showed their commitment to keeping Victorian communities safe.

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

If you have any lessons to share email lessons-management-centre@cfa.vic.gov.au

Tips for succession planning

Effective succession planning is essential for ensuring a steady supply of capable leaders at CFA. Fostering an environment that motivates volunteers to stay and grow is a priority. This approach is crucial not only for the personal and professional development of our volunteers, but also for meeting future demands in our brigades.

- Having a good understanding of your active brigade membership is vital to identify potential leaders and ensure all your brigade roles are filled. Regular brigade membership reviews are encouraged so that any volunteers who may be disengaging are contacted promptly and supported to participate in roles that align with both the brigade's needs and their circumstances.
- Ensure role responsibilities are clearly defined and understood by all your brigade volunteers. When roles are clearly defined, volunteers should then be encouraged to develop their skills and experience, preparing them for future leadership roles. This is also an opportunity to share the workload in your brigade, promoting a balanced distribution of tasks and responsibilities across your team.
- Brigades are required to have an appropriate mix of technical skills and experience for the operational activities they are likely to undertake. Assess if your brigade's active volunteers have the skills required to meet your risk profile, alongside a review of leadership and management skill sets. This will support the brigade to target and tailor individual member's training needs and develop their leadership potential.
- Brigade leadership teams should be transparent about planning for elections. Open and honest discussions should be conducted well before elections, because there should be no secrets about who is intending to nominate. This is the time brigade leaders should be actively seeking and supporting future leaders to nominate for elected positions.



- Make sure your volunteers are well informed about the brigade roles and responsibilities before elections. This helps them understand the skills and experience needed if they are considering nominating for a position.
- When preparing for elections, brigades can use succession planning templates for mapping the volunteers ready and willing to step into a role from one election term to the next. This will also help brigades to understand where their role gaps will be.
- Encourage people of all ages and experience levels to do professional development and leadership courses. This will create a space where everyone's skills and perspectives help people to grow and succeed.

For more information and resources to support succession planning in your brigade, scan the QR code or search for 'Succession Planning Framework' on Members Online.



STORY LISA CLINCH AND KIRSTEN DUDINK

Profile your brigade



**Brigades of CFA:
Warracknabeal**

A Warracknabeal brigade captain invented a motorised pump in the 1920s that was adopted by the Country Fire Brigades Board.



**Brigades of CFA:
Oscar 1**

Oscar 1 brigade is a specialised rescue brigade in an area where there are thousands of unmarked mines.



**Brigades of CFA:
Berriwillock**

Berriwillock brigade's new station is the heart and soul of the area as it's also home to three community groups.

On the CFA website there is a section called Brigades of CFA, where we give brigades the opportunity to tell other CFA members and the wider community about their brigade, their history as well as the interesting and varied tasks and activities our members carry out.

If your brigade has a story to tell, use this QR code to get in touch with us, or go to members.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-cfa/cfa-news/brigades-of-cfa



Help businesses prepare for fire

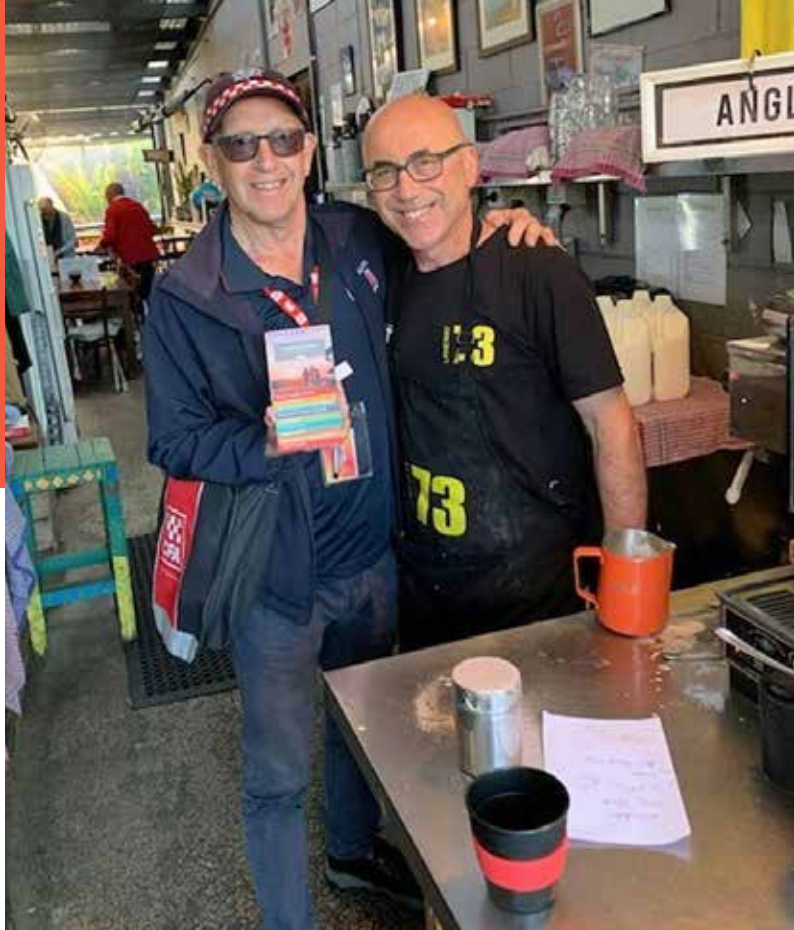
Victoria is one of the most fire prone parts of the world and many of our peak tourism hotspots are often in high bushfire risk areas. CFA has produced a new set of resources – a Bushfire Plan template, Tourism Business Bushfire Reference Guide and online module – to help business owners prepare for bushfire. This information will also help businesses keep visitors and travellers informed about fire.

“Some tourists are aware of the fire risk in the area they visit, others are not, and they look to local business owners and staff for information,” Community Engagement Coordinator for South West Region Paul McCallum explained.

Bushfire planning for tourism businesses is a free online module where users will learn how to:

- understand their local risk
- develop a bushfire plan for their business
- communicate to customers
- prepare for the bushfire season
- get further information.

The Great Ocean Road is one of Victoria’s most popular tourist attractions. Anglesea Fire Brigade members, including Community Safety Coordinator Tony Revell (pictured), proactively engage local businesses about fire safety.



“As members of the local community, it’s easy for the brigade to just wander into local businesses and have a conversation about being ready for the fire season,” Tony said.

Many of us immediately think of our major tourism attractions and accommodation venues when we think of a tourism business, but we should also consider our local café or general store, and cultural, sport and recreation attractions because visitors often seek information from these types of place when emergencies occur.

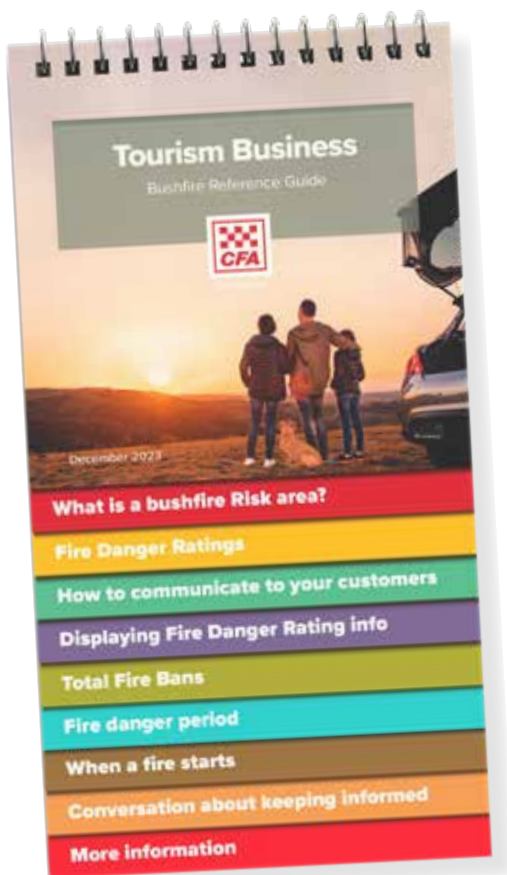
“The resources we have available make it very easy to give locals access to the information they need at a time that suits them. There is no such thing as normal hours for a lot of tourism businesses, so the flexibility of this program was really well received in our area,” Tony said.

Businesses rely on customers during summer, so having a bushfire plan should be part of a business’s overall plan for success. Planning actions for each Fire Danger Rating and staying up to date with the VicEmergency app are vital for the safety of both businesses and visitors.

“Last summer, fires in the Grampians region showed us how important it is for tourism businesses to plan and know how they will prepare for summer,” Paul McCallum said.

After seeing events in the media, customers often contact businesses for advice and information before travelling. This is why it’s important for brigades to help businesses to produce good plans and have information at their fingertips. The online module and planning template will help businesses prepare to stay focused and make clear decisions when under pressure.

Brigades can promote the module and resources to their local tourism businesses by accessing the resources on the Community Engagement Content Portal (cfa.vic.gov.au/cecontentportal). Brigades can also reach out to their community engagement coordinator for more information and assistance. Remember to record all your community engagement activity in ART – you can find help on how to do this on the Content Portal.



THE GREEN FACTOR

The emerging green drought conditions across the state fuelled by a shortfall of rain has the potential to increase the likelihood and intensity of fires heading into the peak months of the fire season.

Story by Shaunnagh O'Loughlin

Green drought occurs when there's enough rainfall to keep the top layer of grass and shallow-rooted vegetation such as weeds green but the underlying soil remains too dry to sustain new plant growth. This can happen even if there has been recent rain because the water may not penetrate to the root systems of plants effectively.

Green drought conditions are unusual but not unheard of. While there are similarities between green drought and drought, green drought can create an illusion of safety through its ability to mask the underlying dryness. When driving past a green paddock or forest area in an area impacted by green drought, you could be forgiven for thinking the fire risk is low in that area.

However, vegetation that appears healthy may still be dry and more susceptible to ignition because of insufficient water. As plants use up the small quantity of stored moisture in the soil, they lose their resilience making them more flammable and causing them to dry out faster. In addition, the tendency for grass and weeds to grow on top of existing dry or matted fuel during green drought conditions creates a bigger fire risk when the top layer dries out, providing additional fuel and encouraging fires to burn hotter and longer.

ECHOES OF ASH WEDNESDAY

While Victoria experienced a dry autumn and winter this year, the impact has been most notable in the far west and south-west of the state which experienced record levels of rainfall deficit. The AFAC summer outlook for the fire season indicates an increased risk of fire in these areas because of the high level of uncertainty in the rainfall outlook and the increase in the amount of dead and dry plant material in forests.

In the state's south-west where the effects of green drought are particularly evident, Corangamite Group Officer, Larpent Fire Brigade member and president of Dairy Farmers Victoria Mark Billing (pictured below) laments at how dry some of the paddock and forest areas are at present compared with previous years.

"The wind has caused a high evaporation rate of water that has hit the ground," Mark said. "Underlying soil dryness is a huge issue, particularly in the western Otways. Any rain we did get in spring didn't penetrate the canopy floor.

"I was 15 when Ash Wednesday happened, and I reckon that's the last time I've seen the bush in the Otways as dry as it is now leading into the fire season. Anything that isn't dry now is going to turn pretty quickly."

It's a similar story further south. As he looks out over his paddocks, semi-retired farmer and Winslow and Yarpurk Fire Brigade volunteer Owen O'Keefe says even though visually his property looks very green and fresh, that's only because of surface moisture.

"The deeper you go into the soil profile it's very dry; deep-rooted perennials are really dying out," Owen said.

"I've been around a while, and like Mark I reckon the current season lead-up is very similar to Ash Wednesday. The Grampians, northern parts of the Otways, forests over Casterton way and along the South Australian border are as dry as a chip. It's been a terrible winter for pasture growth and the grass is very short.

"If we get some good rain we might be OK, but if we don't the first burst of hot weather and northerly winds will rapidly dry out any grass. If a fire gets going on shorter grass it'll burn very fast. In the right conditions fire will almost flash across short grass like burning liquid fuel."

Further north near Hamilton, Captain of Byaduk Fire Brigade and sheep farmer Will Kinghorn said while they've had more grass growth compared with last year, like Owen, he believed the low soil moisture levels coupled with any wind will cause this grass to cure quickly.

"Our biggest risk going into the season is our non-farming and grassland areas such as bushland, forests and plantations," Will said.

"We're located between a state and national park and the bushland and forest floor are pretty dry. There's none of the





moisture in the ground you would normally see at this time of year and composting of forest fuel hasn't happened.

"The lack of soil moisture makes the trees less resilient. It would burn pretty easy if it went up today – this wouldn't normally be the case for this time of year."

SOME FIRE WATER SOURCES ON KNIFE'S EDGE

Not only do the current conditions have implications for fire behaviour and suppression, but the lack of surface water and run-off means important fire water sources are well below normal levels.

"By October we were already 100ml down on rainfall compared to the same time last year, and last year was a dry year," Owen said. "A lot of dams are low, creeks are dry. People haven't been able to replenish their rainwater tanks. Water is going to be a huge issue if we are unlucky to get a hot, dry fire season."

"Colac and surrounds has had the lowest rainfall on record," Mark added. "That rain in October was great to give the pastures a boost, but we just didn't see the usual run-off. We've been up checking over the fire dams in the Otways and they're pretty low."

"In my time on the land, the only comparison I can make is with the 2006 and 2013 droughts, but really we're in uncharted territory."

For brigades in Will's patch, it remains on a knife's edge.

"Usually between April and September you'll have an inch or two of rain in one downpour, but an inch is the most we had in total," he said.

"There's been very little run-off to fill up the dams here, many of which are fire dams. It's going to come down to how much rain we get before the season kicks off."

IMPACT EXTENDS BEYOND FIRE RISK

With many CFA members also working on the land, green drought can have far-reaching consequences and cause significant financial and personal stress.

Although his farm is in a neighbouring shire, unlike Will, Ardachy Fire Brigade firefighter Duncan Macgugan has had very little pasture growth this year and had to buy in significant supplementary feed to keep his stock going.

"The fire season outlook and current conditions will see many volunteers who are farmers heading into the fire season with a high level of background stress," he said.

"Most livestock producers were already in a tough position as we got to autumn this year, only to be confronted by the worst seasonal conditions in 57 years."

"Costs have increased significantly in the past two years. In addition to extra feeding, producers have been forced to sell stock."

"Like many we have been working seven days a week feeding, with little time available to complete other work."

This year is the first year Mark has had to buy in feed. He says the 'croppers' are also doing it tough due to the conditions.

"The grain growers have copped the vagaries of this year's weather as well and there have been a lot of crop failures," he said.

"A lot of farmers will be getting as much of their feed squared away to get it conserved before the grass cures off and the fire season really hits."

"In terms of the impact of green drought on the outlook for the fire season and the farming sector, it's a case of planning for the worst and hoping for the best."

Note: Information correct at time of printing





Faces of CFA

CAMERON SIBEIJN, ELAINE FIRE BRIGADE, DISTRICT 15

What is your CFA role?

I'm currently 1st Lieutenant at Elaine Fire Brigade and a Deputy Group Officer in the Buninyong Group. Prior to this I was in District 14 at Yarrambat where I recently stood down as captain to move to District 15.

In addition to my roles on the fireground, I also enjoy being an instructor, sharing the knowledge I have gained throughout my experience. I recently finished training as a Structural Fire Investigator, which I am thoroughly enjoying.

Why did you join?

The local brigade visited my high school to present on volunteering in the community, and I was immediately hooked. I signed up the next day and have never looked back. Eighteen years later I couldn't be happier.

The opportunity to give back to the community and help those in need is incredibly rewarding. I also appreciate the camaraderie in CFA. It truly feels like a second family.

What incident has had the greatest impact on you?

There have been many memorable experiences over the years, including significant campaign fires and interstate deployments. However, the ones that stand out the most are from the 2019-20 season, during which I participated in several deployments both interstate and in the alpine region. The connections I made and friendships I developed during this time have been long-lasting.

Who have been your mentors in CFA?

I've been incredibly lucky to have so many people I could bounce ideas off or seek guidance from along the way. A key phrase I like to go by is "every interaction is an opportunity to learn something new". Find people who will guide you and support you in your journey and always take the opportunity to pass it onto the next person.

What have been the highlights of your time in CFA?

Numerous memories come to mind from leading strike teams on deployments where we have made a significant difference, to holding the position of captain through some of CFA's most challenging times. But my most satisfying experience in CFA is watching members walk away after attending training courses knowing you've been able to embed some knowledge and set them up for success back at their stations.

How do you motivate your brigade members?

To motivate the brigade, I believe in leading by example, actively engaging in tasks and getting the job done. With individuals or smaller groups, I like to share the knowledge I've gained throughout my journey and the insights others have imparted to me. I also like to push members to exceed their own expectations.

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

I've been fortunate to learn from several legends of firefighting, both within CFA and in private industry. One of my favourite quotes is from author John Flanagan: "don't practise until you get it right, practise until you never get it wrong". The fireground is such a dynamic place and the ability to make sound decisions in command and control comes from our training and experiences we build along the way. Lastly, I'd say never stop learning, keep developing, and look for ways to improve your firefighting skills.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

I enjoy spending time with my family, whether it's camping in the bush or riding motorbikes. My passion for the emergency services sector also allows me to serve as the team leader for the local Ambulance Victoria CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) and spend my days off working as a casual PAD operator for Fire Rescue Victoria. The opportunity to give back to others as well as being part of growing and developing teams is a truly satisfying experience.



Wodonga West hosts Fijians

In mid-September, Wodonga West Fire Brigade members and members from other brigades in the Wodonga Group hosted a community engagement event for the local Fijian community.

As part of our roles as volunteers and the Community Safety team, we have experienced many magical moments and this event reinforced to us why it is such a pleasure to be part of community engagement.

Several months ago, following a community safety session facilitated by AWECC (Albury Wodonga Ethnic Community Council), a number of Fijian community members living and working in Wodonga expressed interest in volunteering with CFA.

As a result, we arranged for them to visit Wodonga West Fire Station, where brigade Captain Gary Lockhart and five brigade volunteers hosted the AWECC Fijian community's introduction to CFA volunteering.

More than 20 Fijian men and women attended the information session, discussing the benefits of volunteering, before moving into the engine bay to be shown the vehicles and equipment.

There was lots of laughter and a lot of water sprayed around. Warning lights were activated and some went for a ride in the Wodonga West tanker. There were many questions about how everything worked and what it was used for.

The brigade volunteers also demonstrated the difference between structure and wildfire personal protective clothing.

The camaraderie at this event between the Fijians and Wodonga West members was palpable, and as brigade Captain Gary Lockhart said, "We have an open-door policy for all to join the brigade and CFA".

After eating, a pastor with the Fijian community began to sing and all the Fijians joined in. The station reverberated with song, bringing tears to many people's eyes. What a joy to listen to them sharing their culture.



Gary thought it was a wonderful evening.

"After sharing some pizza, the magic happened and the meeting room erupted into song with the Fijians sharing some of their culture with us," Gary said.

"It was fantastic to be involved, especially as members from other brigades in the group joined in to make it a group event.

"Events such as this make me a very proud CFA member."

Not all the Fijians are interested in becoming firefighters, though five of them have now joined Wodonga Fire Brigade as a way for them to engage and give back to the wider community.

The event reinforced that CFA needs to continue to encourage and welcome multicultural members of our community to join.

STORY MAUREEN PIERA AND WILL VALE

CAPTAIN TOM GARDINER'S VISION

In the boom years of the Country Fire Brigades Board (CFBB) after World War I, motor cars and trucks gradually took the place of horses, but the manual equipment needed replacing.

Story by Keith Pakenham AFSM

After country fire brigades started using motor vehicles, it was clear the outdated, manual equipment had to be replaced.

The Shand Mason and Merryweather manual pumps were large, cumbersome vehicles that needed about 12 people to take it to a fire. When connected to the street mains water, the folding levers were opened and eight to 10 volunteers operated the pump to improve the pressure a little. The brigades relied on local citizens to help do this job.

The CFBB had already started trialling motorised hose carriages to transport firefighters and equipment to calls as early as 1913 (such as Bendigo brigade's 1912 Commer (also called the Horace Lansell), but very few vehicles had pumps.

TOM GARDINER'S INVENTION

The integration of pumps in vehicles took place in 1925 at Warracknabeal. The process started when the local brigade had an inspection visit from CFBB Chief Officer TS Marshall. After the inspection, the Chief wanted to know whether a small motor could be fitted to a pump or to the old manual engine so that hand levers would no longer be needed.

Captain Tom Gardiner said to the Chief "You are only wasting your money on the obsolete machines. What you want is a motor engine that will get you to the fire quick and also take your equipment, and at the fire have a pump coupled to the water main, and be able to boost up water pressure and be more effective."

"That is what we are after. Have you anything in mind?" the Chief replied. "Yes, I have," Tom replied.

The Chief told him to go ahead and let the CFBB know how he was progressing. At the time, Tom was in charge of Melba Picture Theatre, was the local undertaker and was a dab hand at all things mechanical.

The day after talking with the Chief, Tom obtained an old T-model Ford chassis, a pump and some hoses. These were assembled in a big shed at the rear of his house with the help of several men, and Mercer's Ford Garage helped fix the mechanical parts. They had a friction drive set-up behind the gear box, fitted to a shaft that was connected to the pump at the rear of the vehicle. This was chain driven and it did a good job. From a canvas tank, they were able to get 60 to 70lbs pressure at the gauge on the pump.

However, the chain drive wasn't successful because it stretched over time and was very noisy. The solution was a pump gearbox fitted to the power take off, just behind the car gearbox, and a more powerful overhead valve engine.

THE FIRST PROTOTYPE

When the first prototype unit had been built, and the pump placed in position, the vehicle was taken to Anzac Park, along with 300 feet of hose. Hoses were laid into the dam and the pump set in action. A small vacuum pump had also been fitted to gain prime. This was friction driven near the pump. As soon as they got the vacuum, the delivery pumps were opened and the water came out of the hose at a fast rate.

The hoses were tested to about 90lbs and the team was pleased with the results. With two hoses on, they achieved about 80lbs running a Y coupling and the pump ran smoothly. The next test used the town's mains water supply. The pressure in the main was only 25lbs, but when the pump was switched they were able to boost it up to 60lbs quite easily.

They built a square body on the chassis with a brass rail down the centre to hold a ladder and room for eight, seated four on each side. The Officer in Charge and the driver sat in front. Under each footrest was a tray that opened on the outside, and each tray contained 500 feet of flaked hose with a nozzle attached.

When the truck reached the fire, the tray was opened and one firefighter took the branch end to the fire while the other stood by to couple it onto the street main. Then the pump would boost up the pressure delivering to one or two hose lines.

After several tests and the first fire engine completed, the CFBB was notified of its success and Head Station Keeper at Bendigo Fire Station Jack Trengrove was appointed to the position of mechanic. He was required to travel to Warracknabeal to test the pumping machine. He gave it a thorough test using still water and the town supply. He was thrilled with the results and congratulated Tom on his achievement. He believed the new vehicle would improve firefighting. He reported his results to the CFBB and they decided to hold their annual meeting in Warracknabeal to view the pump.

FULL PRODUCTION BEGINS

Board members were taken to Yarriambiack Creek, which runs through the town, and given a demonstration on still water with four jets of water. Every member of the Board was thrilled by the performance of the machine.

That night the local brigade gave a banquet to honour the CFBB members and the prominent businessmen present. During the evening Board President Mr Wallace announced that the performance of the motor pump was marvellous and the Board had decided to adopt the Gardiner Aussie Fire Engine as a new unit of CFBB. All the units would be built in Warracknabeal.



CASTON
 WHITE-DRAFT HEADER'S
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**GARDINER
 -AUSSIE**

**FIRE
 FIGHTER**



A new fire station was built for Warracknabeal Fire Brigade and the Gardiner Aussie Fire Engine became well established.

The gearboxes were made by Richardson Gear Company, the pumps by Day Brothers and the couplings by Mann Brothers of Ballarat. The first unit built, a T-model Ford, was delivered to Maryborough Fire Brigade.

The units were built on four types of chassis: Ford, Chevrolet, Graham (Dodge), and REO. The Ford version was for the smaller towns, the Graham and Chevrolet for larger towns, and the big REO 6 was for cities such as Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo and Warrnambool. More than 50 Gardiner Pumps were built in Warracknabeal until Tom's death in 1935.

Tom's family didn't want to continue manufacturing the trucks, so the CFBB took over the business. CFBB Secretary GJ Sinclair made a change to the pump design and built the Dodge Sinclair (1933 to 1935 models) at Thompsons Foundry in Castlemaine with permission from the Gardiner family. Eventually they built a workshop in Ballarat, with Wally Titherage in charge of the staff.

Following the establishment of CFA in 1944, design work began on the first custom built tanker. In 1947 the first tanker, nicknamed 'The Firefighter', was built using an Austin K2 chassis with a 300-gallon (1,135-litre) water tank. The first CFA pumper was built on an Austin Loadstar two-ton chassis in 1952 with a 350 gallons/minute (1,325 litres/minute) pump.

CFA firefighting trucks have come a long way, but we should remember the pioneering work of Tom Gardiner which led to our early motorised pumps.



Left: Close-up of pump

Top: Gardiner-Aussie factory, 1920s

Middle: REO 6 pumper. Left to right in front of pumper – Captain Tom Gardiner, mechanic Jack Trengrove, Chief Officer W Chellew

Bottom: Dodge Sinclair, 1935

Great lengths

We call hose ‘our lifeline in a fire’. With more than 2,000 kilometres in service across the state – that’s enough to stretch from Melbourne to Townsville – it is a vital part of CFA’s capability to respond in an emergency. But the tiniest pinhole can put a hose out of service, and more importantly, render it a safety and injury risk.

When a brigade’s hose is taken offline because of damage or a fault, CFA’s specialist hose repair brigades step in to ensure hoses are expertly repaired, tested and returned, ready to bowl out another day. Their members are trained to safely and expertly repair and test hose faults to ensure this vital life-saving equipment is returned to brigades for use as fast as possible.

Hose can get damaged in several ways depending on the type of incident including abrasion, heat, chemical exposure, mechanical damage, improper storage and general wear and tear. Rural brigades dealing mainly with grass and bushfires will more often experience holes or burnt patches, while urban brigades, especially those attending structure fires, may more frequently see large cuts from building materials.

Echuca Fire Brigade Fire Equipment Maintenance Officer Charles Dennis said the hose testing regime was vital to member safety, giving them confidence in the equipment they are using.

“It’s very important that our hose systems work well,” Charles said. “When you couple a hose to a tanker on the fireground you want to be confident you are not at risk it’s going to burst under the pressure.”

Echuca provides Fire Equipment Maintenance (FEM) services to its community, and branched out into hose repair after getting involved in the district’s coupling replacement program. They have been providing hose and coupling repair to brigades in District 20 for almost two years.

“The main work we do is repairing holes, patching and coupling replacement, with our busiest time between November and March due to the increase in fire calls across the fire season,” Charles said.

“We definitely see a propensity for more hose damage in those areas with more scrub land and with brigades outside the urban fringe; fabric hose can be punctured easily being dragged across stones and shrapnel.

“A hose has to be pretty badly damaged before it becomes unusable. Accredited members make sure it’s not only repaired to all CFA standards but that it is tested so it is safe to use straight away if needed.

“While there’s a small financial benefit to the brigade, providing hose repair is a way to give back to the CFA family, and we’re happy to provide the service to brigades and get the job done as soon as possible.”

Geelong West Fire Brigade has provided hose and coupling repair as a service to brigades in District 7 since 2022. The brigade repairs about five to six lengths of hose each week, and similar to Echuca, Geelong West FEM Officer Harry Williams said it was a way members could support neighbouring and district brigades to remain operational.

“Hoses are vital to our firefighting efforts and because damage is so common, quick and reliable repairs ensure we can return equipment to brigades in top working condition. This helps maintain readiness for future incidents,” Harry said.

“Funds raised through hose repairs directly benefit our brigade, supporting our operations and enabling us to purchase new equipment, maintain facilities and service vehicles.

“However, for our members it’s a way of contributing to the broader firefighting community and ensuring that everyone can get back on the frontline quickly.

“Additionally, members gain valuable skills in repairing and maintaining essential firefighting equipment, which enhances their overall knowledge and preparedness.”

STORY: SHAUNNAGH O’LOUGHLIN

Wangaratta training campus turns 40

One of CFA's eight training facilities used by firefighters celebrated its 40th anniversary in early October. CFA members and their families watched hot fire drills and looked over a display of vehicles at Wangaratta VEMTC.

PAD Supervisor Richie Gardner said the facility, which trains volunteers in various scenarios including structural firefighting and breathing apparatus, began its journey more than four decades ago.

"In 1979, Wangaratta Council was approached by some of the local brigades that were looking for somewhere to do hot fire training, which was not something you could do in the town," Richie said. "An area adjacent to the sale yards was open and free and council agreed they could start using it from 1984."

The Wangaratta facility boasts fire attack buildings, props and training facilities for brigades from Kerang to Wallan, the Alpine region, back to Corryong and to the Murray region.

Crews can use simulations of motor vehicle accidents and structure fires to boost their skills, as well as breathing apparatus equipment.

"It gives our brigades the opportunity to train to meet the risk of their area," Richie said. "They can be taught in a controlled environment, but still very similar to the hot, smoky environment of a real fire."

South Wangaratta and Wangaratta fire brigade members participated in a simulation of a service station fire gas attack to show off their skills to the welcoming crowd.

A yesteryear drill also saw International pumpers from the facility's early days used by members once again.

"The good thing about our VEMTC facilities is they're not only firefighting facilities. They're for emergency services training, so Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria and other emergency services organisations also use our training campuses," Richie said.

"You never know when you or your family may need firefighters, and the fact we can enhance their skills and assist them in their development is sensational.

Former CFA members who helped establish the facility gathered alongside current members to formally celebrate the occasion.

CFA Deputy Chief Officer Garry Cook AFSM said it was important to pay respects to those who had the foresight and tenacity to bring training to volunteers as opposed to the other way around.

"We now have another seven facilities like Wangaratta all owned and maintained by CFA, geographically dispersed around Victoria, providing the very same vision that those pioneers had in the early days of District 23 – a first-class training facility accessible to volunteers," Garry said.

"It's a great facility and one that everybody who has had anything to do with over the years is exceptionally proud of. We look forward to the opportunity to provide our volunteers with a base to access their training for years to come."

STORY TYLER WRIGHT





Using AI for disaster messaging

The concept of using an artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot to deliver postcode-specific disaster information won the 2024 Disaster Challenge.

Natural Hazards Research Australia's national Disaster Challenge for early career researchers, postgraduate and undergraduate students took place in early October at the Department of Fire and Emergency Services Bushfire Centre of Excellence in Mandurah, Western Australia.

The central theme of this year's problem was how to build trust, leading to a reduced risk and impact of disasters and a more resilient community.

The winning entry from psychology postgraduate students at James Cook University, Building trust and resilience: Improving community disaster response through personalised messages, used human behavioural theory to develop the idea of an accessible personalised AI chatbot to provide current, localised emergency information that is scalable to various locations and types of disasters.

Winning team member Madison Green believes the team's experience of disasters, including tropical cyclones Yasi in 2011 and Kirrily in 2024, and the Townsville floods in 2019, gave them firsthand insight into how to tackle this year's competition problem.

"Using our own lived experience of natural hazards in Townsville, we experienced a lack of personalised messaging around the risks and implications associated with the natural hazard or the disaster, which left us feeling uncertain, afraid and unsure about how best to help ourselves, friends and families," Madison said.

"This is what prompted us to focus on personalising messages as a way to build resilience within communities before and during natural hazards, as well as grow trust in the agencies and organisations preparing for and responding to disasters."

Teammate Alison Sheaves highlighted the key aspect of personally tailored information during disasters.

"Once we began looking at the disaster information resources already available, including local councils' disaster dashboards in Queensland, we felt that they weren't particularly personally relevant," Alison said.

"An AI chatbot providing tailored, relevant messaging around a disaster would fill this gap, covering preparing for the disaster, up-to-date information, your risk and how to mitigate it."

Team member Craig Ridep-Morris looks forward to further exploring the team's concept with the support of Natural Hazards Research Australia.

"The people we've met during the Disaster Challenge means we're optimistic of collaborating with people from a wide range of organisations and industries to develop a prototype AI chatbot that provides disaster information to really help people understand their risks and prepare and respond to disasters," Craig said.

Natural Hazards Research Australia CEO Andrew Gissing believes tapping into non-traditional areas of disaster management research is crucial to building resilience and trust within and between communities and emergency services organisations.

"The Disaster Challenge, and Craig, Alison and Madison through their winning concept, demonstrate the breadth and depth of the research ideas and disciplines needed to ensure Australia is collectively able to meet the increasing impacts of more frequent and severe natural hazards," Andrew said.

"Harnessing technological advancements such as AI to clearly communicate personalised disaster information could provide people in harm's way with a level of certainty during what is a highly uncertain time, building trust and enhancing resilience," Andrew said.

Other finalist teams representing the University of Western Australia, Murdoch University, La Trobe University, University of Queensland and Queensland Fire Department pitched heatwave community engagement and home insurance incentive solutions.

Go to disasterchallenge.com.au to watch the finalist teams' pitches and for more information about the Disaster Challenge.

The 2024 Disaster Challenge was coordinated by Natural Hazards Research Australia with support from AFAC, Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, Central Queensland University, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water NSW, Department of Fire and Emergency Services WA, Fire and Rescue NSW, Flinders University, Inspector-General for Emergency Management VIC, Landgate, Monash University, NT Bushfire and Rescue Service, NSW Bushfire Research Centre and SmartSat CRC.

STORY JOANNA WOOD, NATURAL HAZARDS RESEARCH AUSTRALIA



PHOTO: BLAIR DELLEMIN

Daylesford memorial service

CFA volunteers are often faced with confronting scenes while undertaking their roles. A crash at Daylesford on 5 November 2023 saw emergency services personnel and local residents responding together in what was one of the worst accidents in recent years.

Members of the Daylesford, Hepburn, Franklindale and Musk brigades were presented with the distinguished Unit Citation for Service from the Chief Officer for their response

Daylesford Fire Brigade Captain Glenn Webster spoke at a service to mark 12 months since the tragedy.

This is his speech.

"In the walkway between the Vincent Street shops and the supermarket there is a small square of cement. People walk past it every day without noticing it. While the cement was still wet, someone picked up a stick and carved the simple words into it: 'Community is everything'. It's a message that resonates with me every time I pass by.

On that terrible day one year ago and in the days that followed, community was indeed everything.

A community made up our wonderful local police who came to the scene so quickly and all the police that followed.

The talented and dedicated paramedics who came to treat and transport the injured, in particular the first on scene paramedics from the Daylesford branch who, only a few minutes prior, had logged on for a routine night shift and were thrust into a scene of devastation and chaos.

The rescue responders and firefighters from my own brigade, the Daylesford brigade, and the firefighters from Hepburn brigade who support us so strongly. All of whom are volunteers and all of whom responded without hesitation and acted so professionally under such terrible circumstances.

The SES crews who came later in the night and stayed for hours securing the site and helping with the clean up.

The doctors and nurses from the Daylesford Hospital and Springs Medical who rushed to help.

And all of the local people who came to help and displayed such courage and compassion. They are ordinary people who displayed extraordinary character. Bravery is defined by one's actions; the bravery it takes to run towards something while others are running away.

All of these people make up our unique and treasured Daylesford and Hepburn Shire community. A community built on resilience, acceptance and compassion. A community that we, in emergency services, are proud to serve.

To the families of the victims and the injured: words cannot assuage the pain of loss you are feeling, but I want you to know that in those terrifying, chaotic minutes your loved ones were not alone. They were here with us.

They were here with us as we comforted them, cared for them and treated them.

They were not alone. They and you will forever remain a part of the extended family of this community."

2024 Junior Leader Forum

This year, the Junior Leader Forum was held on three days in three locations and, although the program for each forum was the same, the participants made them unique, varied and valuable.

At Warragul, Junior leaders had a panel discussion which, among other things, clarified child safety actions they need to take in their Junior brigades. At Ararat, Diversity and Inclusion team member Brad Stephensen discussed resources for Juniors and participants learned more about recruitment and retention. In Shepparton, there were practical activities to help plan and evaluate Junior sessions, and discussions about new developments and future opportunities.

Junior leaders have a wealth of information, whether they've been leading for years or are seeing the Junior Volunteer Development Program with fresh eyes. Some participants suggested more events, more time together and more networking, both between Junior leaders and with the Pathways team (the new name for the HQ Youth and Young Adults team).

At all of the forums there was an activity wall (pictured) where Junior leaders shared their ideas for tried and tested activities including

competition training, excursions, incursions, special events and regular activities. In one creative activity mentioned, Juniors are asked a question such as what would you need to find if you came across someone who has cut their arm? The Juniors then need to explore the brigade's vehicles to find the most appropriate items.

Another suggestion was to create a CFA board game. Juniors work together to create a board game that may have different fire scenarios to practise radio terminology, structure fire procedures or other CFA concepts.

Grovedale brigade attended the Ararat Junior Leader Forum and shortly after they put their learning into practice at their camp at Cooriemungle. The Juniors had an action-packed weekend trying the mini obstacle course, archery and the giant swing, feeding alpacas, canoeing and swimming in the lake. They topped it off with a visit to Timboon Fire Station. The kids had a blast, learned new skills and made great memories.

STORY ALEX REID

Mt Martha's support team

About 24 years ago, Mount Martha Fire Brigade Firefighter Mike Poliness was involved in a car accident. As part of his recovery he walked to get fit, and during this time he noticed that many fire hydrants were overgrown or covered with rubbish.

At about the same time, CFA introduced a broader membership model that allowed people to join brigades in a support role rather than as firefighters, so Mike had the idea of setting up a support team that carried out a range of important tasks. This was an ideal opportunity for people who didn't want to jump on a truck to support their brigade and community.

Twenty-four years later, Mount Martha's Brigade Support Team (BST) is still going strong. Its 20-plus members are mostly older people, both men and women, some former firefighters and some community members who want to help the brigade. The group carries out several duties including maintaining the area's fire hydrants and community engagement.

"Mike convinced a few older members to develop a program to check the hydrants," BST Coordinator Barry Kirkpatrick said. "We still check more than 700 over the year. The position of all hydrants is on a photo map so we know where they are."

The photo, above, shows Bruce Conboy, Nick Flint and Rob Dawson cleaning around a hydrant.

Mount Martha's response area has many unmade roads and the hydrants can be hard to find – especially after a lot of vegetation growth or when people dump rubbish or dirt on them.

"We drop a council flyer in residents' letterboxes that explains why hydrants are important and encourages them to look out for hydrants and not cover them," Barry said.

The group also enjoys delivering the Fire Safe Kids program to local kindergartens early each year and primary schools later in the year.

"In September we took a dozen people and a tanker to Mount Martha Primary School and talked to four classes about fire safety. It's good fun engaging the children. I often drop to the floor and roll around when we're explaining stop, drop and roll. And, of course, we let the kids squirt some water. They love that."

As well as engaging children, the team led by Bruce Conboy enjoys helping older residents to prepare their homes through the Property Advice Visit Service (PAVS).



The BST is also active at brigade open days, helping to engage the community in fire safety.

"In the past at brigade open days we've used an old army tent as a smoke house to teach children what to do in a fire. We've also explained about what happens in car fires and have joined forces with other emergency services personnel to keep community members interested."

The brigade recognises the importance of the BST and Barry can attend the brigade management team meetings to discuss issues relevant to the BST.

"The BST is a valuable part of our brigade," Captain Phil Mapleback said. "By getting involved in so many activities, they relieve the pressure on our operational members so they can focus on turnouts."

"The BST also makes it easy for operational members to transition to a non-operational role while still being actively involved with the brigade."

The team has also played a crucial role at incident staging areas over the years.

"We've helped out at staging areas since the early 2000s," Barry said. "We attended large fires at Heywood and Swifts Creek, and when Malla-coota was evacuated at the end of December 2019 we had a team in Hastings to help with logistics. We also attended the Hazelwood mine fire. Firefighters had health checks every two hours and we kept track of their movements by booking them in and out."

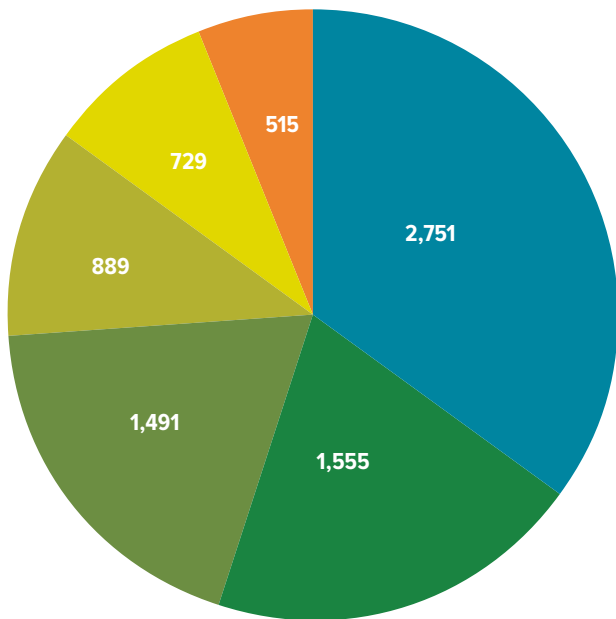
STORY DUNCAN RUSSELL



Incident statistics

1 July 2024 – 30 September 2024

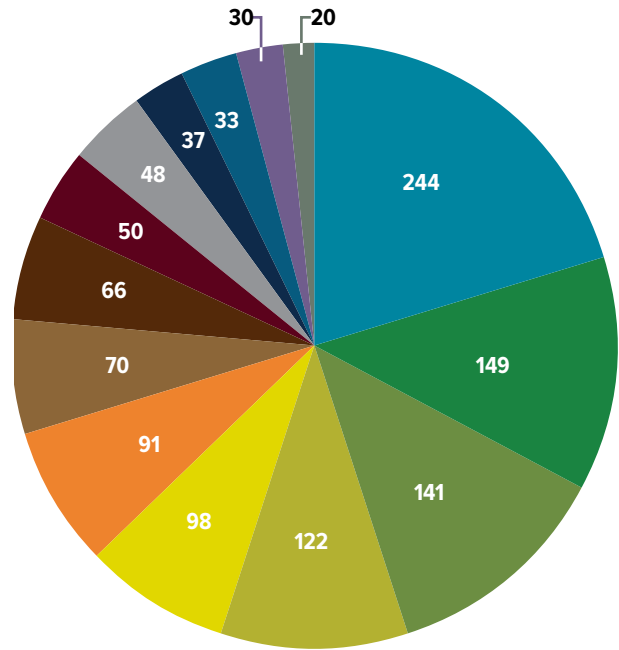
INCIDENTS BY TYPE



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

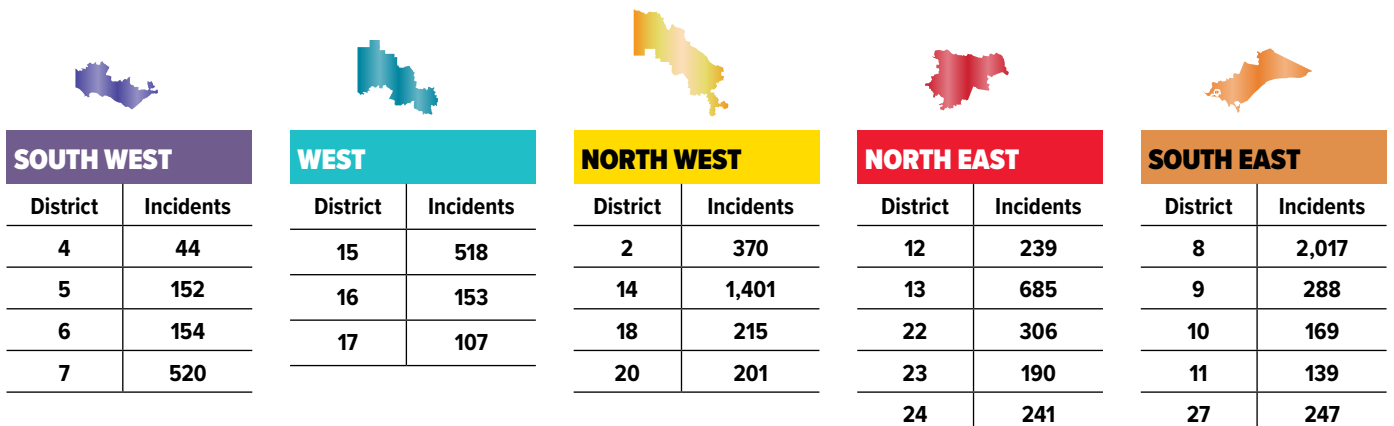
* Includes 2,361 callouts supporting FRV, five supporting other agencies

ORIGIN OF FIRE



Paddock/open area/lawn	
Road/car park	
Undetermined	
Scrub/bush area	
Kitchen/cooking area	
Engine area/running gear/vehicle wheel	
Area of a vehicle	
Rubbish area/rubbish bin	
Garage/carport	
Chimney/flue	
Bedroom	
Lounge	
Switchgear area, transformer vault, switchboard	
Toilet, locker room, cloakroom	

INCIDENTS BY DISTRICT



Keysborough Fire Brigade





- 1 Current fire station
- 2 Bedford J series tanker, 1970s
- 3 Fire station, late 1950s
- 4 Community event, 1990s
- 5 Captain Brian Brewer with Mitsubishi Canter tanker, 1990s
- 6 Church Road house fire, 2007
- 7 Keysborough pumper tanker, 2020s
- 8 Brigade diversity, 2010s
- 9 Greens Road car accident, 2006
- 10 Brigade running event, 1970s
- 11 Santa Christmas run, 1990s
- 12 Supporting McHappy Days, 2000s

Emergency Memberlink

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- Plants, trees and garden products at wholesale prices at **Plantmark**.
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- **Westfund Health Insurance** offers a 5% discount and two-month waiting periods waived on your Extras cover.
- 10% discount on **Electrodry** carpet dry cleaning services.
- 15% off travel insurance with **InsureandGo**.
- **Isubscribe** has an extra 10% off the listed price of any magazine subscription. Titles include Better Homes & Gardens, National Geographic, Gardening, Home Beautiful and New Idea.
- \$300 excess reduction when you have your car repaired at **Sheen Panel Service**.
- **Experience Oz** has at least 10% off deals on attractions, zoos and aquariums, Queensland theme parks, and extreme activities.
- 10% off Australian car rentals with **Budget**.
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- You and your family members have access to discounts throughout the year at **Specsavers**.
- **Sixt Australia** has up to 20% off the best rate of the day on passenger and commercial vehicles.
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- Savings on **Qantas Club** membership via the Member Benefits Corporate Scheme.
- Save 15% off the daily online rate at **Seashells** properties in Broome, Mandurah, Scarborough and Yallingup in WA.
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- Up to 15% off the best daily car rental rate with **Europcar**.
- **RSEA Safety** has 15% off full-priced items instore.
- Discount of up to 30% on standard room only and bed and breakfast rates at **Radisson on Flagstaff Gardens** Melbourne.
- Travel with **Spirit of Tasmania** and save 5% on adult Spirit and Flexi passenger fares.
- Members have access to **Nissan Fleet** pricing and other benefits across a select range of new Nissan vehicles.
- A free small hot McCafe beverage, small soft drink or orange drink with a minimum order of \$4 on presentation of your Emergency Memberlink Card at **McDonald's** restaurants.
- Preferred customer savings rate on accommodation at **Choice Hotels Asia-Pac**.
- **Searoad Ferries** offers 10% discount on ferry travel between Sorrento and Queenscliff.
- 20% discount on unlimited ride tickets at **Luna Park** Melbourne.
- Exclusive pricing on a range of household appliances and electronics through **Harvey Norman Groups & Associations Division**.
- Two months free for pets aged up to one year, one month free for pets aged over over one year, plus 6% off annual premiums and 12% off services through **PetsOnMe Insurance**.
- Up to 40% off the Hewlett-Packard public store price across HP laptops, desktops, monitors, printers and accessories through the **HP Corporate Store**.
- The **Bridgestone Business Associates Program** offers 15% off Bridgestone's website price on the full range of car, SUV and light van tyres.
- 20% off flowers from **Petals Network**.
- **Moonlit Sanctuary Wildlife Conservation Park** offers members and their immediate family 20% off day admission tickets.
- 30% discount on **Milleni** women's fashion bags and wallets and men's wallets.



Brigade

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