

# Brigade

OUR COMMUNITY • OUR CFA



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## DISTRICT 23 REHAB SUPPORT



**Health  
professionals  
who support  
rehab units**



**Recruiting  
young  
people to  
strengthen  
a brigade**



**Next  
generation  
light tanker**

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

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**Printer:** IVE Group

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

The editor reserves the right to edit articles.

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

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COVER PHOTO: TIM DUFF (WOODEND AND WANGARATTA BRIGADES)  
BY ALISON SMIRNOFF



Winter 2024

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## CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



# Natalie MacDonald

I am excited to report that the major update to General Firefighter (GFF) training is almost complete. We are finalising the new package that will be released in July. The updated GFF includes modularised assessments, flexible delivery options, digital assessments and updated videos. Briefings to volunteer and paid instructors have commenced, as well as update sessions to group and brigade training coordinators. We will also carry out member research to ensure the course delivery options continue to focus on volunteers' needs.

CFA continues to create more opportunities for our volunteers who want to develop their leadership skills. The Certificate IV in Leadership and Management was launched this year, and we received 149 expressions of interest for a total of 24 positions. The inaugural 12-month program began in June 2024. We are also looking at options to expand the Women's Challenge Camps to all regions, following a successful initiative in South East Region. These camps provide the skills needed to step into operational and non-operational roles in brigades.

We believe it is important to increase the capability of volunteers so they can be considered for, and effectively contribute to, the CFA Board. We plan to launch governance scholarships so that volunteers can undertake formal board governance training.

We continue to take positive actions to help ensure the behaviours of CFA members, volunteers and staff alike, meet community standards and are in line with our values. Some of the some recent initiatives include:

- The 'Behaviours@CFA' e-learning module was launched in January to complement the CFA behavioural standards workshop and help members contribute to a safe, inclusive and respectful CFA. The 'Valuing our volunteers' online module was launched in March to provide an understanding of the central role volunteers play in delivering CFA's services. It gives insights into everyday practices that foster positive relationships between employees and volunteers.
- We have expanded opportunities to access the Peer Program by training new volunteer and staff peers, with a focus on areas where there is less service provision.
- We have continued to deliver and expand the Captains Peer Mentor Program and the Women in Leadership Mentoring Program. This year, the Captains Peer Mentor Program is running in 14 districts with support from 140 active mentors.
- We have developed resources to support members to take positive steps to foster inclusion, including the 'Building sustainable brigades and teams' toolkit and the Inclusive Language Guide.

As we head into the cooler months, we have launched our next phase of the Volunteer Recruitment Campaign 'Give us a hand' to encourage Victorians to join our ranks before the next fire season. This follows the success of last year's campaign, where 1,844 new members joined CFA.

## CHIEF OFFICER



# Jason Heffernan

Victoria's fire season officially drew to a close when final fire restrictions were lifted on 1 May. I want to reflect on our busy season that not only saw a number of significant bushfires in the west of the state, but also flood response, storm recovery and several deployments. Thank you to all our volunteers and staff who worked tirelessly on those incidents across several months.

We've now shifted our focus to winter with the residential fire safety campaign kicking off last month. The colder months bring a new set of challenges, and as a result the valued work of our volunteers will not stop.

We're seeing many of our volunteers being unnecessarily called to several escaped private burn-offs – we have responded to 815 in the past year, taking more than 22,500 volunteer hours. Please encourage your local community members and landowners to register their burn-offs on the Fire Permits Victoria website, check weather conditions before lighting up, and follow local council laws and regulations.

On Sunday 5 May, CFA held its annual Firefighter Memorial service at the Victorian Emergency Services Memorial in Treasury Gardens. This day was chosen because International Firefighters' Day and St Florian's Day are celebrated on 4 May. Hundreds of CFA and community members gathered at the memorial to honour the memory of the 82 CFA firefighters who sacrificed their lives to save others. Sadly, in the past year we lost two members in the line of duty: Greg Godkin and Garry Mallen. It was an honour to have their families join us at the service, alongside many other family members of our fallen heroes.

CFA celebrated National Volunteer Week recently which highlights the incredible work you do in your communities. Your selfless dedication, time and professionalism is inspiring. Thank you for your ongoing service.

Throughout National Volunteer Week, we promoted the hard work of many brigades across the state in order to recruit more volunteers. This followed the successful launch of our first statewide volunteer recruitment campaign, 'Give us a hand', late last year, which led to 1,844 new recruits joining CFA. We are continuing this campaign which includes targeted advertising throughout winter in regional locations in need of our help, supported by significant media coverage showcasing volunteers across Victoria. The campaign, which began in May, addresses key recruitment challenges facing CFA. We hope to attract a younger cohort (18 to 34 years old) of volunteers to solidify the future of CFA, and also boost the number of firefighters who can respond during the day.

We hope the second year of this campaign will help your brigade recruit new volunteers to help you to continue to protect the communities you live in.

## DCO SOUTH EAST REGION



## Trevor Owen

**Modern fit-for-purpose firefighting equipment, trucks and stations are important. We strive for improved safety and to provide our members with a great experience at CFA.**

But while material things make a meaningful difference, fundamentally they don't change the fact that good community-minded people come together to protect lives and property every day, doing their very best with what we have; Our Community Our CFA.

People are at the centre of our brigades. The successful ones have strong culture, leadership, skills and experience, and are supported by infrastructure. Our 1,200-plus brigades are made up of amazing, dedicated people. It's easy to gloss over this when we are distracted by whatever pressure or change is in front of us.

CFA members come together en masse, at a moment's notice, to respond and support our communities. No agency can come close in such a wide-ranging capacity like CFA can. We should all be proud of how well we do the main thing.

This is no better evidenced than on the eve of the 2023 AFL Grand Final when we put out the call for volunteers to assist with strike teams for the bushfires in districts 9 and 10. CFA members from across the region dropped their long weekend plans and responded. They did again months later to support our western brigades and communities, and again to support SES during the storm event that wreaked havoc across many parts of the state.

At the heart of maintaining this capability is leadership. But first I think it's important to understand the difference between leadership and management, as the two are often confused. In my view, management is about tasks; how to get things done with plans, timeframes and rules. Leadership is about people.

As leaders, we need to inspire our members to do their very best showing feeling, trust, empowerment, motivation and strong values. If we do this well, our people feel valued and part of the team.

I also firmly believe in the application of the 'Mission Command' philosophy of leadership in CFA. At its core, Mission Command requires a leader to set a clear and achievable intent, provide a set of operating principles and give their people the freedom to act accordingly. This approach works at all levels and builds confidence on the frontline. It also supports how we operate, as community-based fire brigades, allowing each brigade to shape and tailor for its own unique circumstances.

CFA and our broader sector is constantly changing, bringing challenges for leaders to overcome. If we want to succeed for our community as best we can, we must show great leadership and always put our people first.

## GROUP OFFICER, D18



## Troy Fisher

**It's a privilege to be group officer of Southern Mallee Group. My area covers the towns of Yaaapeet, Patchewollock, Woomelang and Beulah with four smaller brigades in between.**

While my five years as group officer have been relatively quiet in terms of large fires, I've been fortunate to have a fantastic support network of DGOs, captains, staff and fellow group officers to share the workload throughout my area.

There are two main factors that impact how we respond and how efficient we can be.

**Population decline:** This has affected our group, especially over the past 15 years. Farmers are the main responders, but their numbers have declined by about two-thirds. However, after a run of good seasons there are some younger family members choosing to stay. Also, our captains have had some good recruitment results over the past two years.

On another positive note, our farmers have upgraded their private firefighting equipment, and the group has been extremely fortunate to have received some new equipment to help us respond. This includes a new ultra heavy tanker, delivered at the start of 2024, with a 9,000 litre capacity.

The most important change to firefighting has been the introduction of air support during the busy grain harvest period. Water bombing aircraft arrive at fires long before the first trucks, and they can keep the fires in check until ground crews arrive. We consider aircraft to be an absolute necessity.

**Time and distance:** Our members face incredible demands to be a part of other aspects of their community, including sporting clubs, schools and all the traditional community organisations found in small country towns. While many of our towns have had an influx of people, especially during COVID-19, they tend to be from larger centres where all the services are provided by government and not by volunteers like in the bush. A lot of these people don't even realise that the local CFA brigade relies on volunteers.

Sometimes it can take 20 to 30 minutes for trucks to arrive on scene during the harvest period, and January is a difficult month for volunteer numbers because people are on holiday.

Going forward our group will be relying on aircraft and trucks that carry more water and require fewer crew members.

Support from our CFA staff will also be essential to remain effective into the future.

# RECRUITING YOUNG VOLUNTEERS

Story by Elaine Hamilton

**Young people are the lifeblood of any society. Their energy, creativity, and fresh perspectives hold immense potential for positive change. CFA recognises that young people are not just our future – they are our present too. Their commitment today ensures a sustainable workforce that will protect our communities for generations to come.**

In this feature, we explore how we can tap into this wellspring of talent and channel it toward meaningful impact in our brigades.

## HARNESSING THE POTENTIAL

In the heart of every young person lies a reservoir of untapped potential – a fountain of creativity, curiosity, and passion. At CFA, we have a unique opportunity to unlock this capability and empower our youth with knowledge, critical thinking abilities, and practical skills. Whether it's understanding fire safety protocols, mastering communication techniques, or honing leadership skills, these foundations prepare them to serve their communities with confidence.

Volunteering rates for young people are rising and there is considerable evidence that younger people are deeply committed to making a positive contribution to society. We can harness this promising workforce by offering young people a meaningful place in our brigades. It goes beyond merely imparting our knowledge onto them – young minds thrive on innovation and creativity, so we need to actively listen to their ideas, involve them in decision-making and encourage out-of-the-box thinking.

Young people are not just tomorrow's leaders; they are today's changemakers. Let's nurture their potential and work with them to build stronger, more resilient communities.

There are many rewards to be gained by recruiting young people. They can inject fresh energy into brigades and their enthusiasm and passion can invigorate an entire team. Community engagement activities become more dynamic when young volunteers are actively involved. They bridge the gap between the brigade and the communities they serve, fostering trust and collaboration.

Young people have grown up to embrace diversity. They can support brigades to adopt inclusive practices that sustain strong brigade cultures which attract new members reflective of the whole community.

Young people are also skilled communicators, especially with online platforms, and can mentor and support older members to adopt and learn the latest technologies.

## WAYS TO REACH YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people are digital natives and love technology – it has been a part of their lives since birth. They find most of their information online, on the run, and often through their online networks. Using social media is an easy and effective way to get your recruitment messages through to young people. Most brigades use a Facebook page. However, brigades could also consider using X (previously known as Twitter) or Instagram.

Use existing local social media networks to generate interest. Ask local businesses, community groups, sports clubs, schools/TAFE/universities who have their own Facebook page to share your brigade recruitment posts.

It's critical to develop social media posts and other recruitment materials that appeal to young people. We know through research that young people are motivated to engage in community organisations that make them feel like they belong. They want to make connections and engage with others, to seek opportunities to work collaboratively, and to develop their skills to enhance their employability.

Share positive stories about the brigade, the exciting experiences for adventuresome learning, the skills that can be attained and how they support a range of career pathways. Be sure to include photos of young members (there are plenty of photos in the Digital Library).

Contact your catchment team to discuss support available to you or visit [members.cfa.vic.gov.au/brigades-operational/supporting-volunteers/volunteer-toolkit](https://members.cfa.vic.gov.au/brigades-operational/supporting-volunteers/volunteer-toolkit)

You may also find it useful to read the publication *Young people and the Emergency Services*, by Dr Fiona MacDonald, Victoria University: [bnhcrc.com.au/publications/biblio/bnh-7899](https://bnhcrc.com.au/publications/biblio/bnh-7899)

## WHEN YOU RECRUIT NEW MEMBERS

Make sure your brigade members will be welcoming and supportive of the younger generation. Sometimes the differences between generations can be off-putting, but if you look for the common ground you will be amazed by the similarities that exist.

Try not to be judgemental or have preconceived ideas about what young people bring or should bring to CFA. Understand the skills, attributes, and capabilities they bring to your brigade. Play to their strengths when you can, but work with them to build their capability.

Show interest in each young person as an individual. Every young person is unique, and assuming they are all alike will dampen their enthusiasm and limit you from supporting them to reach their full potential.

Consider inviting your brigade members to a professional development workshop called 'Valuing Youth and Young Adults as Volunteers', developed by CFA in partnership with HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development. This engaging and interactive workshop covers topics including shifts in thinking, the appreciative approach, a Community Youth Development Model, and how to take action. If you would like to have a workshop delivered at your brigade, contact your regional Volunteer Sustainability Team.

## WHERE TO START

Consider starting a Junior Volunteer Development Program. The Juniors Program introduces young people aged 11 to 15 years old to CFA by emphasising fire safety and teaching them a range of skills that set them up to become informed

# TO STRENGTHEN YOUR BRIGADE



citizens who understand the importance of fire prevention and emergency preparedness.

Junior members don't respond to emergencies directly, but they engage in activities that enhance their skills. These activities take place at local fire stations and may include excursions, camps, and Championship events. Many Juniors look forward to transitioning to the senior ranks.

Encourage members aged 16 and 17 years to participate in the Cadets camps. These camps aim to bring our youngest senior members together to meet other young members, give

them some practical, hands-on fire training and work on some teamwork and leadership skills.

Our CFA Youth Engagement Framework identifies the values, principles, and practices of CFA's work with young people and offers indicators of good practice to support the inclusion of young people in CFA. You can read it online: [members.cfa.vic.gov.au/youthengagementframework](https://members.cfa.vic.gov.au/youthengagementframework).

Use this QR code to learn more about these youth-focused programs and resources.



## Echuca brigade recruits the next generation

In 2019 Echuca Fire Brigade (pictured above) received support from the Volunteer Sustainability Team (VST) to review its recruitment strategy. An initial assessment indicated that the brigade had a strong group of operational volunteers. However, the brigade management team could see a potential capability gap as senior firefighters naturally transitioned out of operational roles.

To enhance their recruitment efforts, the brigade took several steps including:

- refreshing their social media presence by creating a new Instagram account alongside their existing Facebook page, both branded as 'Echuca CFA'. This alignment allowed them to leverage the existing CFA brand power
- producing a compelling recruitment video featuring positive stories from brigade members. The video highlighted the benefits of joining CFA and emphasised how everyday people contribute to the community. You can watch the video on the Echuca brigade Facebook page.
- hosting an information night that attracted 25 community members and resulted in 21 expressions of interest
- conducting formal interviews.

Following their initial campaign, they successfully recruited nine new firefighters, three non-operational members, and

one transferring member. The brigade continues to apply this successful recruitment process annually to maintain a healthy membership level.

Since 2019 the brigade's younger membership has increased significantly. There are now 15 Junior members, six members aged 16 and 17 years old, and 13 young adults (18 to 24 years old).

"Our recruitment is mainly through social media now, with paid advertising being one of the keys to success. This is especially important for reaching a younger audience," Captain Dan Moylan said.

"We're noticing the diversity in our membership, and what each member brings to the brigade has helped us to move forward in such an incredibly positive way. By involving our Juniors in our brigade activities, we have seen more input from the younger members and this has brought our Juniors and senior members closer together.

"We are also seeing more Juniors transition to senior membership, either with our brigade or our neighbouring brigades, and we are glad to see the Juniors continuing in CFA life."

Echuca brigade's proactive approach ensures a strong and engaged firefighting community.



# Official opening of fire investigation facility

**In April, Minister for Emergency Services Jaclyn Symes officially unveiled CFA's new state-of-the-art and purpose-built fire investigation training facility at Huntly Victorian Emergency Management Training Centre.**

The \$3.4 million facility is the first of its kind in Australasia and will enable CFA firefighters and other emergency services personnel to learn how to investigate the origin and cause of fires in a safe and controlled environment.

CFA Chief Officer Jason Heffernan said we were committed to providing our firefighters with the best infrastructure, training and support.

"Fires can be started as a result of everyday appliances malfunctioning such as fridges, toasters and battery chargers," Jason said.

"In this new facility, our fire investigators will be trained to identify if something of that nature has happened which can help us prevent future fire emergencies and continue to protect the safety of Victorians.

"We're also excited to be able to share these new facilities with our multi-agency colleagues across Victoria Police, Forensic Services, Fire Rescue Victoria, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Energy Safe Victoria and WorkSafe Victoria."

The facility features four burn rooms which can replicate what happens when a fire starts within a home, garage or other residential environment.

The rooms are fitted with several technological features that can record the temperature of a fire at different levels within the room, as well as a large-screen television that's linked directly to the camera inside each room to observe and record the ignition and development of the fire.

This data can then be used to teach firefighters and fire investigators about fire dynamics and helps them piece together how a fire could have started.

The facility also has a carport where vehicle fires can be replicated. Structure and vehicle fires are some of the most common types of incidents that CFA firefighters respond to.

**Above:** Left to right: CFA Deputy Chief Officer Rohan Luke, Fire Investigation Manager Nicole Harvey, CFA Chief Officer Jason Heffernan, Minister for Emergency Services Jaclyn Symes and CFA PAD Supervisor at VEMTC Huntly Campus Frank Beukelman



Fire investigation not only helps prevent other fires from occurring, but it can also result in product recalls if appliances and equipment are found to be unsafe. For example, an investigation in 2022 identified that the origin and cause of a fire was an electrical failure of a fridge in an outdoor kitchen at a residential property. Details of the make, model and year of manufacture were documented and by working with external agencies such as Energy Safe Victoria, a product safety recall was issued for the fridge.

With a focus on environmental safety and sustainability, the training facility incorporates a \$1.76 million thermal oxidiser to capture and treat the smoke and combustion gases produced from the burns. The smoke can be quite toxic and the thermal oxidiser breaks down the chemicals in the smoke so that just carbon dioxide is expelled from the oxidiser.

The facility is also designed to use a minimal amount of water to suppress fires, and a waste water management system captures and stores the used water. It is then treated off-site.

Use the QR code to see a video of the facility.





# Next generation light tanker prototype unveiled



In a landmark development for firefighting technology, CFA has unveiled its latest truck: the prototype light tanker. Thanks to the collaborative efforts of the Light Tanker Working Group, this vehicle represents a leap forward in firefighting capabilities, combining cutting-edge features with tried-and-true functionality.

The unveiling of this vehicle signifies more than just a technological triumph; it heralds a new era in firefighting capabilities. With its blend of innovation, safety and adaptability, this vehicle stands poised to redefine the landscape of firefighting operations – a symbol of progress and resilience.

The journey began with the formation of the Light Tanker Working Group in late 2020. Comprising representatives from a range of backgrounds including operational volunteers, VFBV, Operations, Fleet Engineering and DMOs, the group set out to redefine the standards of firefighting vehicles. With a keen focus on safety, manoeuvrability and versatility, the prototype was conceptualised to serve as a cost-effective replacement for its predecessors.

It was unveiled at the State Championships in March 2024, where firefighters and enthusiasts alike marvelled at its sleek design and state-of-the-art features. Following the Champs, the truck embarked on a district roadshow to give firefighters the opportunity to examine the vehicle up close and offer valuable feedback. From rural communities to bustling urban centres, the vehicle was praised for its adaptability and potential to revolutionise firefighting operations.

Built on the sturdy Isuzu NPS crew cab chassis, the prototype light tanker boasts an array of impressive features. Its low profile and 4x4 capability ensure optimal manoeuvrability, whether navigating through congested urban streets or rugged rural terrains. Safety remains paramount, with the crew cab equipped with advanced driver assist features and ample seating for four firefighters. Other additions include a protected crew operation platform, pump and roll capability, and a generous water-carrying capacity of 2,000 litres, with 500 litres dedicated to crew protection.



In an ever-evolving world, the need for innovation in firefighting technology has never been more pressing, and with this prototype light tanker, CFA has reaffirmed its commitment to excellence and safety. Use this QR code to watch a video about the light tanker.



## KEY FEATURES

- 2,000 litre capacity including 500 litres for crew protection
- Crew cab with seating capacity for four crew and a fridge
- 8 tonne GVM
- Automated manual transmission
- 4x4 high and low range
- 450 litres/minute at 700kPa main pump
- 20 litres/minute 100 bar ultra high-pressure pump
- Customised cabin handles and crew steps
- Improved crew deck safety:
  - latching crew doors with alarms
  - one metre high side shielding
  - deck camera, awning and intercom
- In-cabin touch screen controls

STORY RICHARD BOURKE

# New Pocketbook app



valuable for areas with limited mobile service, ensuring uninterrupted access to the app's resources and providing a quick reference for process steps.

The app's design is tailored for field use, featuring clear text and large buttons. Navigation can be personalised, allowing users to tag favourite pages for one-click access, ensuring that frequently needed information is readily available. Additionally, the app performs automatic overnight updates, ensuring users have the latest procedures, checklists, and contact information when needed.

The comprehensive content, updated from both 2014 and 2018 printed Pocketbooks, includes a searchable offline contact book that includes HQ personnel through to group and brigade management teams, facilitating seamless communication. The initial integration of practical tools such as calculators and an acronym search facility empowers both new and experienced firefighters to excel.

Furthermore, the app's flexibility allows for future expansion with new calculators, forms, and sub-applications, automatically appearing on users' phones for access to the most recent information when needed.

The CFA Pocketbook app transcends mere application status; it serves as a robust support system installed directly on firefighters' phones. Through this technology, CFA volunteer firefighters are better equipped, more informed, and ready to tackle emergencies with confidence and precision.

Look out for the launch of this app.

STORY STUART FRENCH

**In the dynamic world of firefighting, where each incident can present unique challenges, the introduction of the CFA Pocketbook app stands out as a game-changer for volunteer firefighters.**

This mobile app will serve as an essential aid, offering rapid access to crucial checklists and key information across various emergency scenarios, whether firefighters are using their own equipment or accessing it on CFA mobile devices.

The Pocketbook app ensures that knowledge is always at their fingertips. Compatible with both iPhone and Android devices, the Pocketbook app is engineered to function entirely offline, providing critical information without the need for internet connectivity. While it doesn't replace Members Online, it makes relevant operational information and tools available for members in the field. Its full offline capability is particularly

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# Update on wildfire PPC

The New Generation Wildfire PPC Project is funded to supply 30,000 sets to operational members. So far, CFA has despatched more than 9,000 sets to members across the state and has more than 14,500 orders in the system.

CFA receives about 2,000 sets each month for distribution to operational firefighters, and it is estimated it will take 12 months to complete the rollout. Orders are picked, packed and posted in brigade lots and distributed to districts. Members will receive an email when their order has been despatched to the district, provided an email address was given. Districts then organise delivery to brigades.

Orders are being distributed evenly across the state based on the date entered, though this will also depend on sizing availability. The aim is to complete an entire brigade's order that has been entered where possible. The brigade is not required to have the entire brigade's orders in the system prior to distribution.

Velcro surname badges have been ordered for all orders in the system, which replace the blank Velcro name badges. They will be distributed to districts in brigade lots.

Due to the new generation wildfire PPC being a different cut to the current wildfire PPC, it's recommended you try on the new PPC at a district office or the State Logistics Centre (call to make an appointment) before placing an order. This will save time in returning the clothing, in the event the sizing is incorrect.



PHOTO: BLAIR DELLEMIN

If you think your size has changed since your original sizing session, please contact your district office to be resized.

At the PP&C Summit held online in March 2024, CFA members were shown the key features of the new-generation wildfire PPC garments. Use this QR code to watch a video explaining the features. If you have any queries email [wildfireppc@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:wildfireppc@cfa.vic.gov.au)



STORY NICKI LUND

## Attending the memorial for 40 years

**For almost 40 years Barry McLean has attended the Annual Firefighter Memorial to honour and mourn the loss of his son.**

Darren McLean, Barry's son, died in 1982 at the age of 17 in a tragic firefighting accident just two weeks shy of finishing school at St Paul's College in Traralgon.

Darren, a budding journalist, was involved in a tanker rollover on 14 February.

"They were going around the side of the hill and as the tanker moved over the dirt road broke away. The others got off – he didn't," Barry said.

"He was pinned underneath the tanker. He was there for an hour or two before they could get a helicopter and a crane to lift up the tanker.

"If his mates had not been there to keep his head above water he would have drowned. He was last off and he did not make it."

Churchill Fire Station is at the end of Barry's street and now, 40 years later, has a memorial of firefighter roses out the front.

Darren was Barry's and his wife Val's (who passed away two years ago) only son. Barry will continue to attend the Annual Firefighter Memorial.

"You meet people you have met years ago that are in the same circumstances," Barry said.

This year's memorial was held on Sunday 5 May at the Victorian Emergency Services Memorial in Treasury Gardens to honour the 82 CFA firefighters who have lost their lives in the line of duty

Donald Fire Brigade firefighter Greg Godkin and Portland Fire Brigade firefighter Garry Mallen tragically died in the past year. Portland Captain Ryan Delony did a reading and laid a wreath in honour of Garry.

"Garry showed every single value and attribute of a firefighter. He was a firefighter's firefighter that we had the privilege to know and work alongside," Ryan said. "He deeply cared about his family, his community and his brigade and for that he will be dearly missed."

Donald Captain Dale Anderson said Greg lived for the fire brigade and was the first to arrive at every job.

"One thing we really miss about him now is having a bloke that turns out at every incident. He was very committed to CFA," Dale said.

Recognised worldwide, the date of International Firefighters' Day (4 May) coincides with St Florian's Day in recognition of St Florian, the patron saint of firefighters.

Use this QR code to watch the 2024 Firefighter Memorial service.

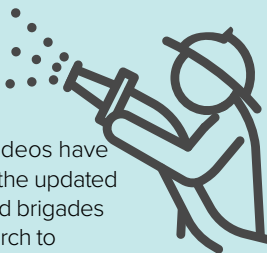


# UPDATE ON MAJOR PROJECTS

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

## Enhancing General Firefighter training

The GFF Improvement Review Report has been presented to VFBV and CFA's operational leaders. The updated GFF includes modularised assessments, flexible delivery options, digital assessments and updated videos. New videos have been produced to support the course, and the updated course will roll out to districts, instructors and brigades in July. We will also carry out member research to ensure the course development focuses on volunteers' needs. The GFF satchels will also be updated.



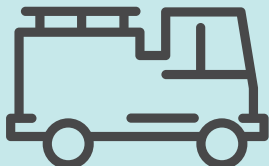
## Mobile Data Capability

There is a need for our members to access broadband data in the field. Procurement of tablets is complete and tablets were showcased at this year's State Championships.

A district tablet allocation list has been produced for comment. The next steps are to finalise the allocation list, analyse district feedback and plan the tablet rollout.

## Replacement of pumper fleet

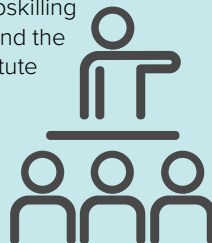
We are updating the current, successful medium pumper. The contractor is progressing to the functional design stage, and we are finalising the design of major components including plumbing, locker volume and driveline. The contents of the stowage kit have been confirmed and they will be received shortly. The next step is to work on the vehicle's user interface in consultation with the working party.



## 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 received feedback from almost 1,000 CFA members about the VLD framework. We asked for expressions of interest for a Certificate IV in Leadership and Management and we received a large volume of interest. The next step is to launch the Certificate IV to successful candidates.

We are also in the process of completing business cases for new programs, including Women's Challenge Camps, Governance upskilling scholarships, and the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience Volunteer Leadership Program.



## Community alert sirens upgrade

CFA's community alert sirens at 47 fire stations use a 3G interface. This needs to be upgraded to the 4G network by 30 June 2024. A manufacturer has been contracted to make a control unit that will operate on 4G and a field installation company has been contracted to install the units.



## Volunteer Recruitment Hub

More improvements have been made to enhance the system's functionality and the experience of applicants, brigades and districts, including how the hub looks, structural changes to reduce delays in application progression and automatic reminder letters sent when an application hasn't progressed within the system. In addition, the system will allow for dual membership in fire brigades, forestry industry and headquarter brigades, and police and medical checks will be done at the same time to streamline the verification process.



# DCOs hear from our younger members



**In a vibrant and inspiring event, 50 young volunteers aged 11 to 17 years old from brigades across the state gathered at the Urban Junior State Championships for a Youth Forum.**

Hosted by the Youth and Young Adults Team, the event fostered engagement, gathered feedback, and aimed to empower the next generation of firefighters. Participants engaged in various activities designed to hear their voice and enhance their involvement in CFA.

While young members are indeed the CFA of tomorrow, they are here right now and playing their part. It's important that we listen to them to help shape CFA to be inclusive, engaging and vibrant.

The forum's main objective was to hear the voices of young members and collect feedback to inform ongoing improvements to youth programs and the wider CFA. Through structured feedback sessions, participants had the opportunity to give their thoughts on various aspects of membership, ranging from leadership opportunities to inclusion issues.

Their input was welcomed by Deputy Chief Officer Garry Cook and Deputy

Chief Officer Kaylene Jones, who attended the event as special guests to reaffirm CFA's commitment to foster a culture of inclusivity and commitment to youth engagement.

"By raising awareness about the unique perspective and skills that young people bring to CFA we can help ensure that young people continue to play a critical role in CFA into the future," Garry said.

One particularly meaningful activity involved exploring what skills and lessons learned should be included in a merit system, similar to Scout badges, that takes young members through from Juniors to gaining their firefighter status. Young members gave feedback about potential merits such as hose work and radio communications, and suggested some alternative ideas such as incident control basics, community engagement and animal hazards.

"This is what I've been waiting for since I started at CFA. I'm so excited," Grovedale Fire Brigade Junior Tom DeFrancesco said. "I love the idea of working through a set of merits that will eventually progress into doing my General Firefighter training."

The forum sessions provided first-hand experience in decision-making, problem-solving, and effective communication – all crucial skills for their roles as future firefighters. The sense of determination and dedication to CFA was evident during these exercises, and highlighted the commitment these young members have to serving their communities.

The final session of the forum was a question-and-answer session with Garry and Kaylene. In an atmosphere buzzing with enthusiasm, participants had the invaluable opportunity to interact directly with senior leadership, and the young members asked insightful questions, shared their experiences, and discussed their aspirations in CFA.

Questions ranged from advice on the pathway to becoming a captain, to career firefighting and issues about diversity and inclusion. The young members posed questions that were well-informed and demonstrated their desire for long-term volunteering with CFA.

"The engagement and participation of our young members at the Youth Forum was inspiring. These young people are committed to CFA and plan to be here for a long time. It's important we engage with them, encourage and support them in their endeavours now and not just in the future," Garry said.

At the end of the forum, the young members were recognised for their contributions and commitment to CFA. Each participating member received a CFA cap, and the ice cream van was on hand to help everyone cool down. Garry reiterated the organisation's unwavering support for its young members, affirming their pivotal role in shaping the future of CFA.

The Youth Forum exemplified the power of youth engagement. Through meaningful dialogue, interactive activities, and feedback, young members not only enriched their own experiences but also contributed invaluable insights to the organisation. As they continue their journey with CFA, they do so with a strengthened sense of purpose and a deepened connection to the organisation.



STORY JEN CLEMENT

# KEEPING FIREFIGHTERS SAFE IN

Firefighting comes with risk, including the risks of smoke and heat stress. It's important that all members get home safely – and that's where our skilled rehab units can help.

Story by Shaunnagh O'Loughlin

You may have seen our rehab units on the fireground supporting the health and wellbeing of members. CFA has 22 rehab units across the state – all run by volunteer members – and one team at CFA headquarters. The units carry health monitoring equipment, thermo-anemometers, oxygen, heaters, fans, water, women's hygiene packs and snake bite kits to help firefighters make a speedy recovery and get them back to operational duty as soon as possible.

Rehab units can be requested through Firecom. For more information about rehab at CFA, email Peter Langridge, Manager Operational Health Monitoring and Rehabilitation: [p.langridge@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:p.langridge@cfa.vic.gov.au).

We spoke to four volunteer members of our rehab units about their experiences, the importance of rehab and why you should come and have a chat when you see them at an incident.

## ANGELA COX, YELLINGBO BRIGADE

Although she is now also an operational firefighter and brigade secretary, registered nurse Angela Cox joined Yellingbo Fire Brigade in 2016 specifically to provide firefighter rehabilitation.

"After attending a community safety information day, I knew I wanted to help my local community," Angela said.

"As Yellingbo had the first dedicated rehab vehicle and I was from a health background, I jumped at the opportunity to use my skills to contribute in this way.

"But you don't have to be a health professional to join a rehab unit. Most of our team members haven't got a health qualification and full training in firefighter cooling methods, hydration practices and first-aid injury management is provided.

"The units are a close-knit team that provides camaraderie, and being part of a rehab team is a wonderful way to give back to the community if you don't want to be an operational firefighter."

Angela stresses the importance of the role and of rehab units in preventing significant injury and hospitalisation of firefighters with carbon monoxide poisoning.

"It's our job to help everyone get home safely," she said. "Carbon monoxide is a dangerous gas. What we don't realise as firefighters is that it builds up in our blood when we are around toxic smoke and fumes.

"By taking firefighters off the fire front for half an hour or so to let them cool their core body temperature and let them breathe fresher air while we check their hydration and carbon monoxide levels, we can ensure they are safe and rested, ready to return to the firefight.

"Early intervention is key. That's why it's so important to request rehab early so we can be most effective," Angela added.



## TIM DUFF, WOODEND AND WANGARATTA BRIGADES

"Depending on the services being offered at an incident, a rehab unit might be a chance to sit and grab a drink and a bite to eat, have a yarn or get a check over while you rest," student doctor Tim Duff said.

Tim joined Woodend Fire Brigade as a firefighter at the end of Year 12 after feeling frustrated at not being able to support his community during fires in the area.

"Joining a rehab unit came later after the teams became more popular and we developed one in Woodend," he said. "I'm currently placed in Wangaratta as part of my studies and am responding with the District 22 and 23 units while I'm here.

"Being part of a rehab unit is a great way to get involved, see more incidents and experience the logistical side of emergency management. There are roles for firefighters, non-operational members and of course health professionals."

Tim said evidence showed that rehabilitation works, with the goal to keep members safe and on the fireground.

"Rehab unit members are well trained, resourced and informed and are there to prevent people from getting to the point of needing serious medical help," he said. "Better to pick up on small things before they go unnoticed and affect your work on the fireground, your return to work or your long-term health."

Tim recalls a proud moment at a grassfire in Clarkefield where rehab team members all picked up consistently high carbon monoxide readings while firefighters were blacking out.

"We used that as an opportunity to brief crews about how the chemicals we breathe in while firefighting can affect us – perhaps faster than most realised," Tim said.

"It was awesome to see so many firefighters coming up to us after, asking about carbon monoxide and how to avoid it.

"For incident controllers and crew leaders, calling in rehab is simple, hassle-free and ticks a massive box in looking after your firefighters. For individuals, there's really nothing to lose."





## **SUE CLARKE, MOE SOUTH BRIGADE AND YALLOURN NORTH REHAB UNIT**

“The message is very much about prevention. We rely on our firefighters to keep us safe and we should be doing all that we can to keep them safe on the fireground,” Sue Clarke said.

Sue has been a member of Moe South brigade since 2016. A GP, she has also been a member of Yallourn North’s rehab team, one of the first brigade-based rehab teams at CFA, since 2018.

“My husband is a volunteer. Over the years I had become increasingly concerned about the health and safety of members on the fireground when the opportunity to join a rehab unit came up,” Sue said.

“There are many potential health issues faced by people when fighting fires, particularly during prolonged campaigns in hot weather when heat stress is a very real risk.

“Often when volunteers arrive at a fireground they are already at the lower limit for hydration, and we know that heat stress is a risk factor for cardiovascular events such as heart attacks.”

Sue said preventing heat stress can reduce the risk of serious medical events occurring while members are fighting fires and even in the immediate weeks afterwards.

“We have monitoring equipment that helps us assess for heat stress and carbon monoxide levels. We have cooling chairs, hydration fluids, and most popular – chips and lollies!

“We also spend time educating volunteers when we are on a fireground or at training exercises. When volunteers have a better understanding of the purpose of rehab we find they are keen to be checked.

“It’s an adage we hear a lot but it’s always true: prevention is better than the cure.”



## **GREG PARKER, SMYTHESDALE BRIGADE**

An endorsed enrolled nurse, Greg Parker has been a CFA volunteer for 27 years. He joined his parents at Smythesdale brigade when he was 11 years old as a member of the running team. As well as being the brigade’s specialist response coordinator for rehab, he’s currently Grenville group officer.

“When you go to incidents as a rehab unit you are there to support all emergency services,” Greg said.

“A lot of members don’t know what we do or what rehab and health monitoring is all about. You are there to provide a service but also to educate the members who come through or those who may hesitate to come through.”

Smythesdale brigade was approached a number of years ago to see whether it was interested in starting a rehab unit for West region.

“We had a couple of health professionals in the brigade who thought it was a great idea,” he said.

“Some members were sceptical because they weren’t sure how the cooler chairs worked. But when they had experienced them, there was a total shift in their thoughts about the unit.

“We started with a repurposed support trailer and about three or four years ago we were able to purchase a purpose-built rehab unit as part of VESEP.”

Greg encourages members to come up and chat if they see a rehab unit on the fireground.

“Firefighter rehab is vital to help our members to recover on the fireground. It is there to assist crews to recoup post strenuous work, giving them an area to have something to eat, rehydrate and, if required, have their health monitored by crews.

“And it doesn’t just have to be at a structure fire. Rehab can be used at grass and scrub fires, long duration hazmat, long duration rescue, and many others.

“Come and ask questions. All teams are happy to explain what we do, how we do it and why.”

# 2024 State Championships

**More than 75 CFA urban and rural brigades left their mark in Mooroopna over two weekends in March, competing in the 2024 CFA/VFBV State Firefighter Championships.**

Participants, supporters and the wider community were officially welcomed to the first weekend of competition with an opening parade, and speeches from CFA Deputy Chief Officer Kaylene Jones, CFA Board Member Dawn Hartog and VFBV State President Samantha Collins.

The Urban Juniors officially kicked off the Championships, with Melton A again finishing as champions for the fourth consecutive year and the team's fifth win in six years.

CFA Deputy Chief Officer Kaylene Jones congratulated all the competitors who participated and thanked those who worked hard to get the event up and running.

"It is always fantastic to be in Mooroopna for the Championships," Kaylene said. "After an extremely busy month with firefighters and staff from across the state being deployed to assist with the recent bushfires, it's incredible to see how hard everyone has worked to pull this event together."

On the second weekend, the annual Torchlight Procession brought a new spark to the State Championships, as brigades marched the streets of Mooroopna with new LED-powered lanterns (see top photo).

It was the first time a team from the Women's Network in districts 9 and 27 attended the Champs. Warragul Fire Brigade firefighter and Women's Network member Dani Watkins was excited about participating.

"Like most of South East Region, we have a Women's Network in districts 9 and 27," Dani said. "A couple of us decided to put together a running team because it looked like a bit of fun."

The team enlisted the help of Pearcedale Fire Brigade to get up to speed for the specific events, training once a week or once a fortnight in the lead-up to the state event. They quickly became crowd favourites at Mooroopna and headed home with the Outstanding Female Team award.

Melton A Seniors were again the urban champion brigade, giving the team its third consecutive State Championships win. Eldorado A won the Rural Seniors event, and Ascot & District A was the Rural Juniors champion team.

The corporate tent was lively, featuring displays with the latest updates from many innovative CFA programs, including Operational Training, Infrastructure and Fire Medical Response, alongside the Planned Burn Task Force, Community Engagement and Volunteerism teams. A collection of CFA vehicles and equipment drew in many interested onlookers.

The atmosphere across both weekends was full of camaraderie, team spirit and determination, and an array of food and beverage trucks kept the competitors well fed.

CFA Chief Officer Jason Heffernan once again rallied his Chief's Chargers for some healthy and humbling competition. As one of our proudest and longest-running traditions, Jason said it was fantastic to see hundreds of members involved in the Champs.

"The State Championships are a great opportunity for our volunteers to not only engage with their peers competitively, but also develop life skills, build friendships and support like-minded regional communities," Jason said.

To see the full event results go to [vfbv.com.au](http://vfbv.com.au). Use this QR code to watch a video of the Champs.







# How Pomonal brigade prepared its community

**Pomonal is a small township on the eastern side of the Grampians National Park. “Pomonal community members are no strangers to fire, having been impacted several times across many years,” Community Engagement Coordinator Jenny McGennissen said, “and Pomonal Fire Brigade is highly engaged with its community.”**

On 13 February 2024, when a lightning strike started a fire in the Bellfield area, south of Halls Gap, many community members had already begun to enact their fire plans. This was in response to the information communicated by Pomonal brigade the day before. As the VicEmergency warnings began being issued, residents were aware of the pending threat. They realised that the fire could easily impact them, as conditions changed throughout the day.

When the south-westerly wind change occurred, the incident control centre warned the community via Emergency Warnings, firstly to leave now, and then to shelter in place.

“The brigade worked hard that day to protect the school, fire shed and the buildings on the main road to ensure the infrastructure was here for the community afterwards,” Pomonal Fire Brigade Community Safety Coordinator Andrew Cross (pictured) said.

However, important preparatory work began in 2022, when Jenny helped Pomonal brigade develop a community engagement plan. Part of the planning process is identifying risks and key infrastructure and then pinpointing the local opportunities to engage the community. Pomonal brigade established itself as a community information source, to provide practical advice with the aim of increasing the community’s awareness of their fire risk.

The brigade’s community engagement plan includes regular attendance at the Pomonal Village monthly market, local newsletter contributions, information sessions, school visits and brigade property advice visits (PAVS). The brigade has worked hard to ensure the community can make good decisions when a fire comes.

A Community Fireguard group was set up in 2019 and the Pomonal Resilience Group worked in partnership with Pomonal brigade to advocate fire preparedness and planning for businesses and landowners. The Northern Grampians Shire

council supplies green waste vouchers as part of this property preparation initiative and Ararat Rural City Council was heavily involved in providing support and recovery services after the February fire.

Although more than 40 homes were destroyed in February, it’s important to acknowledge that no lives were lost.

“The work that Pomonal brigade has done in community engagement contributed to this outcome. The community was alert to the risks, alert to the warnings and took action to protect themselves that day,” Jenny said.

After the fire, the brigade started two new initiatives that will form part of their community engagement plan in the future. With support from the Pomonal Progress Association, the brigade is working to erect new property signage across the community. During the fire, responding brigades found it hard to find property numbers as the plastic posts had melted. Made of the same steel as a street sign, the new signs are designed to rust over time, making the white number more prominent – even in the dark.

“We are also encouraging owners to ensure gateways and property access are large enough to fit a fire truck. While we talk to property owners, we are giving them a flyer that shows how much room the fire truck needs,” Andrew explained.

Having a brigade community engagement plan is the best way to support fire preparedness and prevention activities in your community, to help ensure it is as prepared as Pomonal. It also means your brigade will meet its operational preparedness requirements under section 29 of the CFA Act. The Act requires each brigade to have a community engagement plan relevant to the local risk profile and community need.

Support and resources are available to help your brigade develop a community engagement plan. Check out the Community Safety Coordinators tab on the Community Engagement Content Portal ([cfa.vic.gov.au/cecontentportal](http://cfa.vic.gov.au/cecontentportal)), and the training available on the Learning Hub (Community Safety and Engagement section). Your BASO or community engagement coordinator can also provide information and assistance.

STORY JO GELLATLY

# New radios rolling out

**CFA is set to deliver more than 18,000 new radios across the state which will improve brigades' communication in the field.**

CFA conducted a three-month pilot in March 2023 which involved 15 brigades from different parts of the state. The pilot program assessed a range of radios in everyday operational activities, installation processes and training materials.

The feedback from the pilot brigades enabled selection of the preferred radios and contributed extensively to the planning for the full rollout of vehicle, hand-held and base radios across the state.

Chief Officer Jason Heffernan said this significant upgrade to our radios would strengthen our communications at incidents which also strengthens our emergency response from brigades.



"The new radios will have multiband capability which allows direct communication with our partner emergency services agencies here and interstate, further boosting our interoperability," Jason said.

"They also include additional functionality including GPS on the hand-held portable radios which improves firefighter safety on the frontline.

"It's important for CFA to continue to upgrade its devices with the latest technology and we look forward to the completion of this vital program."

The \$138.8 million Radio Replacement Program is funded by the Victorian Government as part of a 10-year services contract to upgrade and support CFA's radio equipment.

Plenty Fire Brigade Captain David Rumble, whose brigade was part of the three-month trial, was impressed by the new radios.

"They're simple, intuitive, easy to pick up and use and their multi-agency ability is incredibly useful at an incident," David said. "Our brigade has thoroughly enjoyed using them and we look forward to seeing them used across the state."

CFA expects the radios will be rolled out over an 18-month period. This has already begun, starting in District 14. Members have completed their training and the delivery of portables has commenced. District 8 and 13 are next in line and training began in May. Districts 7, 2 and 15 will follow and the radio project team will meet with a new district every two weeks until all districts have commenced their training.

STORY AMY SCHILDBERGER

# Update to SAS now available

**The Supplementary Alerting Service (SAS) Release 9 includes the integration of Android Auto, pager history improvements including the ability to clear pager history, support for the latest iOS and app versions, bug fixes and upgrades to front and back-end features.**

SAS works alongside the existing EAS paging system to give members increased functionality and enhanced communication during incident response. As well as allowing members to confirm their response to events, the free SAS app allows members to view response times, chat with fellow members and view responding members' core qualifications and competencies.

Release 9 includes updates to the station turnout system functionality first introduced in Release 8. Updates include the introduction of alert tones and customisable rate/speed for text to speech and timer readout. SAS administrators will also notice improvements to the search and reporting functionality.

Android Auto is a mobile app developed by Google to mirror features of an Android device on a car's dashboard information and entertainment head unit. SAS 9 allows members with Android devices to receive and view event notifications and event history as well as navigate an incident directly from their car's dashboard screen.

Using SAS Android Auto in vehicles requires all members to follow road rules as mandated by VicRoads. Members will be required to accept a disclaimer before using the SAS Android Auto functionality.

Members are advised to download the latest version of SAS to avoid negative impacts on functionality. It's also important to ensure your phone's operating system is updated to continue using the app and take advantage of the availability of Android Auto and other improvements.

After downloading the update, members may wish to log out and back in with their username and password and should check push notification and alert tones, as they may have returned to default settings.



More information on the SAS including the SAS User Guide, training videos, FAQs and more is available at [www.cfa.vic.gov.au/sas](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/sas)

For SAS support or to provide feedback, email [sas.help@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:sas.help@cfa.vic.gov.au).

STORY SHAUNNAGH O'LOUGHLIN

# QUARTERLY OPERATIONAL UPDATE



## Chief Officer's message for winter

As we head towards the cooler months, I would like to acknowledge the hard work and ongoing efforts of our members. We have had several busy months with parts of Victoria impacted by catastrophic conditions resulting in major fires in the western parts of the state. Despite the challenges, our members continued to support their communities.

### 'First on scene' – RECEO and structure fires

We introduced our 'First on scene' series in the last edition, focusing on establishing control, dynamic risk assessments and situation reports.

In Part 2 of the series we cover RECEO – Rescue, Exposures, Containment, Extinguish, Overhaul. We discuss how it may apply if you arrive on scene at a structure fire without BA operators, and what actions you can take until additional support arrives.

### Fire equipment maintenance (FEM) induction program

FEM at CFA is a collection of more than 260 brigades based across the state that engage in commercial activities in their own and sometimes neighbouring communities. These commercial activities are a part of a legislative requirement placed on building owners to ensure their fire equipment is serviced and ready.

### Credible Critical Issues Program and hazardous trees

The Credible Critical Issues project is designed to ensure that CFA is taking all necessary steps to keep its members safe and meets its obligations under the Worksafe legislation in relation to industrial manslaughter. The project has collated data from CFASafe over a 10-year period from January 2013 to October 2023 to identify safety issues that have been known to cause fatalities within CFA and other emergency services organisations.

Data from CFASafe over a 10-year period to October 2023 shows that during this period there were 85 reported incidents. At a national level, deaths caused by falling trees has increased and includes three CFA members. For more about hazardous trees see the hazardous trees information sheet.

### Lessons Management Centre

The Lessons Management Team has developed two case studies that accompany this update and I encourage all members to read these and consider the application of the lessons identified in their own

operational response. These case studies provide valuable insights from incidents as well as questions that you can use to prompt discussion during brigade training.

**Kangaroo Ground electric vehicle fire:** Following on from the article released in the March Quarterly Operational Update, we are including a case study on the electric vehicle fire that occurred in August 2023.

**Eastern Golf Club structure fire:** In October 2023 fire broke out at a popular golf club which resulted in crews from CFA and FRV brigades working together to bring the fire under control.

Here's a glimpse of what else the Lessons Management Team has been working on this year.

- NT and Queensland insights – the Lessons Management Team received 298 observations from more than 500 members from 18 districts. The observations and insights have now been validated and submitted for review.
- Post Season Debrief Program – at the beginning of April, the Chief Officer's 'Post Season Debrief Program' was released. The program identifies key insights, trends and opportunities for improvement from the 2023-24 fire season.
- Lessons Platform (LP) – work is underway to develop a new Lessons Platform. This will provide a way to digitally submit observations from incidents and AARs. We trialled the LP for submitting observations relating to the Post Season Debrief Program. When development ends, the platform will be launched to all members.

I would like to acknowledge the valuable work that each of you contributes during what can be extremely difficult circumstances and acknowledge the impacts that these contributions have on you and your families. Thank you for your continued commitment.

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



# First on scene series

## House fire without BA operators

In the March 2024 Quarterly Operational Update, we introduced the 'First on scene' series, and covered the guiding principles of arriving first on scene at any incident.

In this issue, we discuss the principles related to the first 15 minutes of a structure fire without BA qualified members. Some of this discussion will also be applicable to a brigade arriving first on scene to a house fire in a non-firefighting vehicle, such as a rescue unit or slip-on.

*Imagine this...you arrive on scene at a house fire with smoke issuing and flames visible. It's at a private residence in a rural part of your brigade's response area. As the first crew leader on scene, you are the incident controller (IC). The crew members from your brigade are not BA qualified. Supporting brigades are en route with BA qualified members, but they won't arrive for more than 10 minutes.*

*The neighbours who reported the incident believe the occupants are home and there is no evidence the building has been evacuated – indicating that a rescue may be required.*

*After establishing control and undertaking a size-up to get an appreciation of the situation, you think to yourself what now?*

## Safety

The safety of yourself, your crew and the community should be your highest priority at every incident, as outlined in Standing Order 11 Health and Safety – see <https://applications.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/Show?pagelid=displayDoc&docid=002969>. At all stages of an incident, members are only expected to respond and act within their competence. This means performing to the best of their ability and training, and maintaining the safety of themselves and the community.

## RECEO

The principles of RECEO are applied to ensure we prioritise the actions taken and should be conducted at all incidents as per SOP 9.28: Strategy and Tactics – see <https://applications.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/Show?pagelid=displayDoc&docid=002897>. Some of these activities may happen concurrently rather than sequentially.

**Rescue:** urges you to consider potential casualties, who's at risk and who's impacted.

**Exposures:** all fires produce exposure problems which, if not protected, will become the avenues of spread for the fire. Consider how neighbouring properties/infrastructure could be protected.

**Containment/confinement:** consider the area impacted and whether it can be contained. Consider if an external attack can safely contain the fire to the room or part of the building involved.

**Extinguishment:** consider what is needed to combat the incident, what's been done and what needs to be done.

**Overhaul (ventilation and salvage):** think about when ventilation can be undertaken safely and whether we can limit damage to property by considering salvage earlier than overhaul.



## First 15 minutes

It is unlikely in this scenario that you would have the time to work through each of the RECEO priorities. However, it is beneficial to consider how you could prepare appropriately so that when supporting crews or resources arrive, you are well placed to continue working through the incident priorities.

## Rescue preparation

One of your first priorities as IC should be to identify whether a rescue is required. Good intelligence is highly beneficial to make the determination of whether someone is in the building. The more information you obtain, the better prepared you will be. Information from the original caller may assist, along with visual cues such as whether there are cars in the driveway or lights on inside.

If you have identified there may be occupants in the building, you should attempt to identify where they are located and where the fire is within the building. You may do this by working with other occupants or people on scene, or observing through windows and doorways. If possible, determine the layout of the house and any potential hazards or risks you may encounter, such as cluttered hallways, locked doors, hidden areas, or dangerous goods.

Following this, consider whether safe entry can be made using a dynamic risk assessment. If the occupant is in an accessible area that can be safely reached, such as by the front door or near a window situated away from the fire, you may be able to undertake a rescue. If that's not possible or safe, you should prepare to assist the rescue when qualified operators arrive on scene, such as preparing access and isolating services such as power and gas.

## Ventilation

Ventilation can help rescue trapped people, extinguish the fire and reduce damage from heat, smoke and water. By clearing smoke and heat from the structure, the survivability of any occupants is likely to improve and visibility will increase, making it easier to locate the fire. The structure could be ventilated from a safe position using a ceiling hook through a window or a similar technique. When doing this, caution should be exercised for any signs of backdraught and where possible, this should occur from the highest points first.

Given that ventilating may also cause an increase in fire intensity, hose lines should be available, and may be used through ventilation openings.

### Actions to help extinguish or protect exposures

Without immediate access to the requisite skills or equipment to conduct an internal attack, your response may be limited to containing the fire to the structure of origin through external attack and protecting exposures.

Potential actions may include:

- identifying any nearby water sources, including preparing any hydrants if you have access to a hydrant key
- mounting an external fire attack while you wait for supporting crews.
  - Determine the most concerning avenues of spread and direct crews to attack accordingly.
  - Provide water curtains where necessary to absorb radiant or convected heat to minimise risk to exposures.

### Asbestos

Asbestos poses a risk to the health and safety of CFA members, and the necessary actions should be taken to protect members.

With consideration to the age of the building, assess whether asbestos may be present. If you reasonably suspect any material on the property may contain asbestos, ensure the procedures for asbestos are followed, which in the early stages may include identifying and securing the contaminated area, using appropriate PPE such as P2 masks, and ensuring that the risk is communicated to the arriving crews who will be undertaking internal attack. Search for SOP 10.03 on Members Online to read more about asbestos.

### Site management

The IC should consider the staging of vehicles and ensure suitable access for incoming supporting vehicles to minimise delays when mounting an internal attack.

In addition, the management of people resources is important to ensure the scene is safe and members and the public are not putting themselves in danger. Consideration should be given to appointing a safety officer.

### Additional support

If at any point you need additional support or advice, this can be provided by the state duty officer, requested by Firecom.

In addition to other firefighting resources such as pumpers or BA support, you may also need to request other services such as police and ambulance, or utility companies for power and gas. Arriving first on scene at a fire with potential life risk without BA qualified members is a dynamic and challenging environment. Members should do what they can to protect life and property in line with the skills, equipment and resources on hand at the time, while ensuring the safety and wellbeing of crews.

## Fire Equipment Maintenance (FEM)

FEM-related activities constitute a significant part of CFA's industry engagement, with more than 50,000 customer sites visited across the state each year, servicing almost 500,000 pieces of vital fire safety equipment.

In addition to fire safety outcomes, brigades use revenue generated through FEM activities to support the purchase of equipment, vehicles, specialist tools, building works and training. Many brigades use the money generated through FEM to supplement larger funding applications such as those through the Volunteer Emergency Services Equipment Program (VESEP).

There are 11 videos designed to help brigades perform the necessary administration tasks required under FEM. The videos are divided into short topic-specific segments that can be used as a visual quick reference guide for managing FEM activity.

- FEM Induction – introduction
- Resources
- Certificates of service – receiving
- Certificates of service – completing and verifying
- Certificates of service – returning
- Invoices – general requirements
- Invoices – contractors
- Quotes and estimations
- Cancellations and agreements
- Debt Collection and management
- Reports

We encourage all new FEM officers to work through these videos as an induction to the role as well as providing a more in-depth understanding for those who support this work such as captains and BASOs.

Access all the videos through this QR code.



Brigades interested in joining the FEM program can find out more at [members.cfa.vic.gov.au/brigades-operational/brigades/fire-equipment-maintenance](https://members.cfa.vic.gov.au/brigades-operational/brigades/fire-equipment-maintenance). Or call **1300 363 661** or email [fem@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:fem@cfa.vic.gov.au) to speak to a member of the FEM team.



Photo: Blair Dellemijn

# Hazardous trees

Falling trees, limbs and branches can strike operational personnel and members of the public, block access along roads, designated escape routes or fire control lines, or can be a traffic hazard.

A weakened tree structure is a heightened risk and is an important hazard to be aware of. All personnel should be able to identify tree hazard markings and be able to use barrier tape to establish exclusion zones and request expert assessment and treatment.

This risk could occur during:

- grass and bushfire response
- blacking out
- storm and flood response
- vehicle accidents involving trees
- aircraft fire bombing in treed areas
- planned burning.

## Actions implemented

As part of the Credible Critical Issues project, to protect members from injury or death, additional risk controls have been agreed to be implemented at CFA:

- Cabin pillars will be reinforced where practical. The ECE-R29 standard will be included in further specifications as a preferred requirement and considered as part of the overall value-for-money assessment of offers.
- CFA will offer tree hazard assessor training based on operational requirements of the brigade.

- AFAC has developed guidelines (at the draft stage) called 'Considerations for the selection of falling object protective systems for emergency service response vehicles' protection against hazardous tree strikes'.
- Consider the following additions to operational policy:
  - add a specific hazardous tree assessor role to incident management protocols
  - include specific mention of hazardous tree issues.
- Promote JSOP 8.03 Tree Hazard – Bushfire Response to all brigades through the Chief Officer's Quarterly Update.
- Explore the potential to make the Tree Hazard Awareness training package available to third parties such as councils involved in operational response.

## Document links

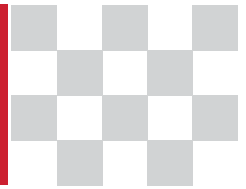
JSOP 8.03: <https://files-em.em.vic.gov.au/public/JSOP/SOP-J08.03.pdf>

For hazardous tree awareness training, go to the Learning Hub – [learninghub.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://learninghub.cfa.vic.gov.au).

Use this QR code for the tree hazard pictorial guide and tree hazard symbols.



PRE FIRE	POTENTIAL HAZARDOUS TREE	HAZARDOUS TREES	CPD TREE	POST FIRE
<p><b>POTENTIAL CPD TREE PROTECTION ASSURED</b></p> <p>A tree which in its current state <b>does not appear hazardous</b>, but may become a CPD tree if it catches alight or is impacted by wind or other fire related disturbance.</p> <p>It has a high probability of surviving the fire intact based on the proposed protection measures and likely response resources available.</p>	<p><b>POTENTIAL CPD TREE PROTECTION NOT ASSURED</b></p> <p>A tree which in its current state <b>does not appear hazardous</b>, but may become a CPD tree if it catches alight or is impacted by wind or other fire related disturbance. <b>It does NOT have a high probability of surviving the fire</b> intact based on the proposed protection measures and likely response resources available.</p> <p>or</p> <p>A tree which in its current state may in part of wholly <b>fall and impact personnel in its potential impact zone</b> (but is not considered to do so during the expected time frame of the current operation).</p>	<p><b>TREES WITH HANGERS</b></p> <p>Hangers are limbs which are hooked up or tangled in other limbs and can be dislodged by external factors (wind, impacts from machinery other trees, fire) during the operation.</p>	<p><b>TREES WITH HANGERS</b></p> <p>A tree or branch that is <b>likely to fall within the expected timeframe of the current operation</b> and impact personnel in its potential impact zone.</p>	
<p><b>LOW</b></p> <p>But could rapidly rise if tree becomes fire affected or through other operations.</p>	<p><b>INCREASED HAZARD</b></p> <p>Deemed to have, or present evidence of increased hazard.</p>	<p><b>INCREASED HAZARD</b></p> <p>Deemed to have, or present evidence of increased hazard.</p>	<p><b>EXTREME</b></p>	
<p><b>YELLOW CIRCLE</b></p>	<p><b>YELLOW SLASH IN A CIRCLE</b></p>	<p><b>YELLOW CROSS IN A CIRCLE AND ARROW ABOVE POINTING TOWARD THE HANGER</b></p>	<p><b>YELLOW CROSS IN A CIRCLE</b></p> <p><b>YELLOW CROSS IN A CIRCLE AND ARROW BELOW SHOWING DIRECTION AND DISTANCE TO HAZARD</b></p> <p>10M</p>	



## Kangaroo Ground electric vehicle fire

### Summary

On 10 August 2023, CFA crews were called to what was initially reported as a grass and scrub fire in Kangaroo Ground. It was later identified that it was a single car collision with a tree with possible people trapped, requiring a prolonged seven-hour response from emergency personnel.

This case study offers insights into the challenges faced by emergency services during incidents involving electric vehicles (EVs) and encompasses firefighting strategies, mental health considerations, communication challenges and coordination with multiple agencies. The aim is to provide valuable lessons that can aid brigades when responding to similar incidents.

### Incident overview

At about 11pm, crews from Kangaroo Ground Fire Brigade were paged to a grass and scrub fire on Eltham-Yarra Glen Road, Kangaroo Ground. A Kangaroo Ground brigade member who was en route to the station identified that the incident was actually an electric vehicle fire with possible persons trapped, and communicated this via 000 to Firecom as well as responding crews. This information was also relayed to the responding crew which was considered by the Incident Controller as part of their initial enroute size up. On arrival it was determined that the occupant of the vehicle was deceased.

The initial plan was to knock down and extinguish the fire, protect trees and exposures, while the IC finished the size-up. The plan included anticipating the need for a significant amount of water, appointing a water sector commander, continuous monitoring with a thermal imaging camera (TIC), cooling as required, and briefing other agencies (including the tow truck driver) about the risks.

When on scene they implemented the initial attack plan, and adapted strategies as the situation evolved. High-flow water was used to combat flames originating from the interior of the vehicle, with a particular focus on areas around the floor and rear bench seat.

Surrounding exposures included trees, shrubs and a nearby power pole. There were no other structures nearby. There was a low risk of explosion in open air with only slight wind at the time.

The team had predicted a need for substantial water to extinguish the EV fire and the potential exposure risks to emergency services personnel.

CFA Control and breathing apparatus (BA) support were set up close to the incident, though not within view of the deceased occupant to reduce the exposure to personnel. SES members were asked to help supply lighting equipment and Ambulance Victoria set up rehab and conducted health checks.

A single fireground channel was used throughout the incident which was sufficient, however on several occasions the communications for Firecom were broken because of portable radio battery failure.

The fire was successfully extinguished within 30 minutes, with efforts concentrated on preventing its spread beyond the vehicle. Multiple lines were used during containment and extinguishment.

BA crews were strategically rotated to minimise exposure. Water supply was crucial, with a closed relay established from a hydrant. Mental health considerations were emphasised, and efforts were made to protect members from potential trauma.

As soon as it was practical, crews from Research and Wattle Glen brigades were released to return to their stations, and others were released at about 2am the following day. Some crews stayed on scene until about 5am with a charge line and TIC to monitor the vehicle.

Another page was sent requesting crews to return to the scene as the vehicle needed to be checked before the coroner arrived. During the second period, they monitored the temperature and provided a charge line to protect the SES crew while it cut the vehicle so that the occupant could be extracted.

The incident was prolonged, involving media interactions, tow truck operations, and ongoing monitoring until the vehicle was removed. In the days following the incident, an after-action review (AAR) was conducted to record detailed observations about the flames, vehicle composition and tactics as well as lessons about mental health, note-taking and what we can improve if a brigade is in a similar situation.



## What worked well

**Firefighting strategy:** Effective strategies involved directing water into battery casing breaks, and staging BA crews wisely. Special attention was given to vapour clouds, cautious attack angles, and assessing the feasibility of letting the fire burn out.

**Mental health:** Mental health was prioritised by relocating incident control, screening the view of the deceased person promptly, and providing clear instructions. Support systems were put in place, including peer support, welfare assistance, and AAR.

**Incident management:** There was a timely appointment of key roles and seeking advice from the state duty officer. Clear briefings were given to other agencies, and crews remained on-site until the EV was removed. There was good planning for crew comfort during a prolonged incident.

## Lessons identified

### Control agency awareness and inter-agency coordination

- Recognise that police on the scene may not be aware that they are the control agency.
- Clearly brief other agencies about fire containment and extinguishment plans.
- Seek police assistance if media becomes aggressive or bystanders refuse to clear the incident scene.

### Communication challenges

- Consider using newer, green radios for improved communication.

### Resources and safety measures

- Consider attacking the vehicle only from corners to reduce the risk from explosion.
- Consider using a monitor on the truck for cooling during prolonged incidents.
- Consider calling for a rehabilitation unit during prolonged incidents.
- Consider using the ANCAP rescue app for identifying car features.
- Consider using P2 masks more widely for enhanced protection.
- Consider leaving a vehicle and crew on scene until the vehicle is removed by a tow truck to minimise the risk of reignition.

### Firefighting strategy and mental health

- Consider moving incident control location away to reduce mental health risks.
- Stage incoming BA crews behind a truck to avoid unnecessary exposure to deceased person and smoke.
- Clearer instructions and rotations for crews during prolonged incidents.
- Improve local knowledge of hydrants and water sources.
- Appoint a new crew leader if the incident controller becomes CFA commander.
- Plan for catering and crew comfort during prolonged incidents.
- Wearing BA for fires outside of structures may be required and should be a consideration.

## Incident management

- Ensure police are aware of their control agency role and assist in forming an emergency management team (EMT).
- Appoint operations officer, water sector commander and safety officer early.
- Seek advice from state duty officer as required.
- Clearly brief other agencies on fire risks and containment approach.
- Seek police assistance with media if they become aggressive.
- Advise police about concerns over rough treatment during vehicle recovery.

## Questions for your brigade

- Is your brigade aware of the ANCAP Rescue app that identifies the features of the car and do you have this available on a device? Go to [ancap.com.au/ancap-rescue-app](http://ancap.com.au/ancap-rescue-app).
- Does everyone in your brigade understand the management of battery fires and the associated hazards?

## Conclusion

This is the first known incident of an EV catching fire after colliding with a tree, resulting in a fatality. The key lessons encompass firefighting tactics, mental health considerations, and coordination with other agencies.

This case study underscores the critical need for enhanced firefighting tactics and coordinated responses in incidents involving EV fires. It highlights the vigilance required and the unique challenges of EV fires, the importance of mental health awareness and effective communication among emergency responders and agencies.

Sharing this case study is crucial to enhance the preparedness of firefighters and rescue operators dealing with EV incidents. It provides valuable insights into both successful strategies and areas for improvement, fostering continuous learning and improving overall emergency response effectiveness.





## Eastern Golf Club fire

### Summary

During the early afternoon of 16 October 2023, crews from Coldstream Fire Brigade in District 13 responded to a direct alarm at the Eastern Golf Club. The golf club building, in the rural suburb of Yering, is about 100 metres x 50 metres in size and consists of a restaurant, shop, social rooms and offices. The initial information from Firecom was that there was no smoke and fire, but within minutes this quickly changed and prompted the evacuation of staff and a request for additional pumps.

### Incident overview

On a cool, windy day, CFA crews were called to a structure fire at the Eastern Golf Club. Coldstream Fire Brigade's pumper and tanker were the first to respond to the alarm. While enroute, a staff member at the premise called Triple Zero Vic to provide additional information and stated that there were no signs of smoke or fire. Within minutes, a caller provided additional information that there was a fire in the storage room. Within two minutes of the first communication, an updated message was received from Firecom that there was smoke and fire coming from a storeroom, which prompted the evacuation of the building. Based on this information, and the smoke that was visible enroute, the Coldstream brigade captain made an immediate decision to request an additional three pumps.

On arrival, Coldstream crews were confronted with black smoke coming from the roofline and a plume of black smoke from the storeroom doorway. Pumper operators immediately positioned a 65mm gated wye valve with two 38mm hoses attached to apply water directly to the fire until breathing apparatus (BA) crews arrived. After the BA crews arrived on scene, they continued to attack the room which allowed the incident controller, the Coldstream captain, to step back and observe the fire. Noticing the fire was well inside the ceiling space, he immediately ordered the crew to pull back and maintain a defensive attack.

Despite their efforts, firefighters were faced with a fast-moving fire being fanned by a strong westerly wind. Along with the roof tiles being made from fibreglass and no fire barriers inside the roof space, it only took 20 to 30 minutes for the fire to advance from the western to the eastern end of the building. At about 2pm a word back was given reporting that the fire was "not yet under control" and an immediate request was made for additional vehicles. These included:

- Pumps from Chirnside Park, Mt Evelyn and Mooroolbark
- FRV 26 pumper tanker
- FRV 27 teleboom
- FRV 87 ladder platform
- Bayswater BA van and Yellingbo Rehab unit
- Nilumbik Group field operations vehicle
- Scoresby hose layer.

To assist with the coordination of operations, the district command centre (DCC) assigned two commanders. As the additional vehicles arrived on scene, the fireground was divided into east and west sectors, and an incident management team (IMT) was established.

The building had three double-headed Milcock hydrants installed, however they were located inside the structure which prevented crews from accessing them before the fire took hold. As the facility was not equipped with a firefighting reticulation system, crews were reliant on two 36,000-litre static water supplies from the tanks. These were exhausted during the early stages of the operation.

The Scoresby hose layer was requested to respond early to lay hose lines to the fireground from two nearby dams. The first dam required 650 metres of hose for the teleboom and the second dam needed 850 metres for the ladder platform. This ensured a sufficient water supply for the remainder of the firefight.

During the operation, crews implemented a full ring main with 65mm hose and shutoff dividers, which enabled 38mm lines to be placed strategically around the building every 30 to 60 metres. This set-up assisted with blacking out.

The fire was considered under control at about 6pm on the same day, with a structure fire stop in place at about 9am the following morning. As operations continued throughout the night, crews were relieved in stages at 7pm, midnight and 7am. Early the next day, an excavator arrived on scene to help firefighters extinguish the remaining hotspots which continued until 2.30pm.

### What worked well

**Response time:** Scoresby hose layer along with the aerial teleboom were called to respond early, which allowed crews to continue their response with continuous water supply.

**Shift planning and resources:** Shifts were organised early and having a split nightshift meant for easy shift filling. Planning these shifts strategically allowed the first responding crew to go back to work the following day.

**Sectorisation:** Two sectors were put in place because of the size of the incident, which assisted in the organisation of crews and reduced the amount of people reporting to the incident controller and IMT.

**Management of equipment:** Brigades labelled equipment left behind for easy return after the incident. In addition, the traffic control in place helped responding trucks to avoid driving over hoses which helped ensure there was no damage to equipment on site.

**Communication:** The incident controller gave clear instructions which allowed crews to follow a plan and ensured everyone was on the same page.

### Lessons identified

**Initial information:** During the initial response, crews were given conflicting information about what to expect on scene. This was out of their control however, and as a result caused a delayed request for further vehicles therefore increasing response times.

**Pre-incident action plan:** Coldstream brigade had a laminated pre-plan that was used on the day to identify power, gas and water. However, the pre-plan was deficient on water volumes and identifying internal or external hydrants as being attack or boost hydrants which can assist with response planning.

#### Additional engagement with local commanders:

Having two commanders on scene proved highly beneficial to assist fireground operations and incident control. It would be useful to enhance the brigade's response and relationships with local commanders by having the commanders attend local brigade training.

**Ladder platform operations – pumping:** When working with FRV to stage vehicles, it is valuable to consider placing a pump within 15 to 30 metres of the ladder platform to ensure efficiency of water and stream delivery. The same considerations do not have to be made for teleboom vehicles because they have an onboard pump and don't require a pump in close proximity.

### Questions for your brigade

- When responding to a direct brigade alarm/protected premise, are you thinking about and prepared for the potential that it may be a fire or the situation may be different from what you are expecting when you arrive on scene?
- Have you identified your nearest specialist equipment such as aerial appliances? Do you know how far away they are and what their requirements are when they arrive on scene?

### Conclusion

A significant structure fire which is detected by a direct brigade alarm, is not a common occurrence. However, it is always a potential outcome of an alarm. In this event, factors such as limited water supply, common roof space and weather conditions further complicated this response. All members involved remained adaptable and work together cohesively to manage the incident.

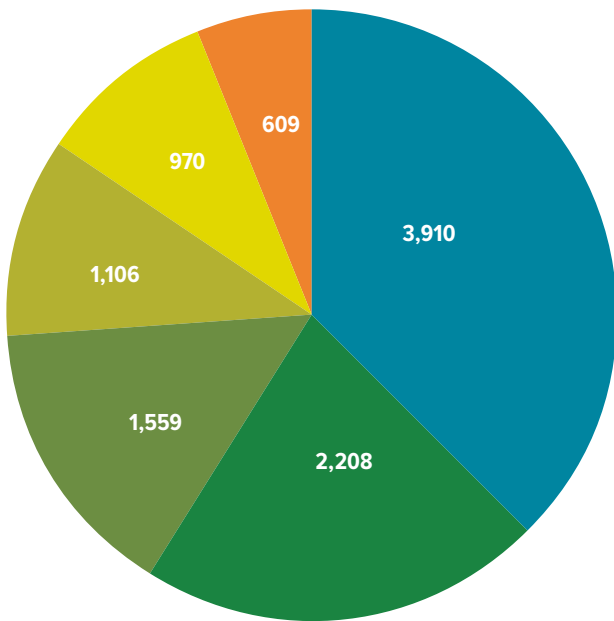
The CFA Coldstream brigade captain would like to thank the responding stations and firefighters that worked so hard on the day, into the night, and the following day. The professionalism shown through support and advice was appreciated. As we all know, one person cannot cover all aspects of a large going fire where tactics are changing constantly throughout a developing structure fire.



# Incident statistics

1 January 2024 – 31 March 2024

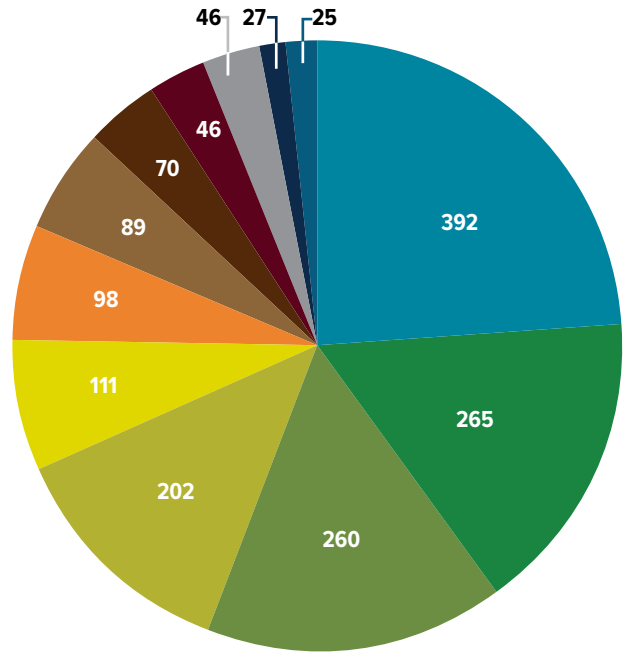
## INCIDENTS BY TYPE



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

\* Includes 2,926 callouts supporting FRV, 22 supporting other agencies

## ORIGIN OF FIRE



Paddock/open area/lawn	
Undetermined	
Road/car park	
Scrub/bush area	
Engine area/running gear/vehicle wheel	
Kitchen/cooking area	
Rubbish area/rubbish bin	
Area of a vehicle	
Garage/carport	
Crops	
Balcony/porch/verandah	
Court/terrace/patio	

## INCIDENTS BY DISTRICT

SOUTH WEST		WEST		NORTH WEST		NORTH EAST		SOUTH EAST	
District	Incidents	District	Incidents	District	Incidents	District	Incidents	District	Incidents
4	92	15	751	2	581	12	294	8	2476
5	210	16	339	14	1532	13	886	9	322
6	176	17	186	18	304	22	496	10	176
7	696			20	304	23	253	11	190
						24	254	27	329

# Broadening our capability through FIBs

**“With 336,531 hectares of plantations in Victoria, it’s essential the plantation industry is well equipped and ready for the threat of wildfire,” CFA’s Forestry Industry Brigades (FIB) Field Officer Ian Hamley said. “Critical to its success are forestry industry brigades.”**

In 1997 the Victorian Government introduced legislation requiring forest plantation companies to form fire brigades when their plantation assets reached a critical size. FIBs are formed under Section 23A of the Country Fire Authority Act. There are 19 FIBs in Victoria providing critical support to CFA and other fire agencies in both preparedness and response activities.

Ian is actively engaged with the different industry brigades to ensure good communications and relationships with CFA, and to help FIBs meet member training and equipment requirements by providing advice and guidelines.

“FIBs are self-funded and rely heavily on the guidance of CFA to provide the appropriate training and equipment to meet their legislated requirements,” Ian said.

With billions of dollars of assets at risk from wildfire each summer, Victoria’s FIBs are well organised and take their role seriously. Their training program, which aligns

with CFA’s, includes General Firefighter, Plantation Firefighter and Class A foam use.

Each year Hancock Victorian Plantations runs a well attended weekend firefighter training camp at Shelley in north-east Victoria. The camp covers training aspects including planned burns and suppression tactics. This year’s camp took place in early May.

FIBs, and the forestry industry more generally, are becoming more sophisticated in their approach to wildfire, with increasing investment in preparedness and response capabilities as part of the wider wildfire sector. For example, in south-west Victoria, the forestry industry has formed the Green Triangle Fire Alliance, which funds a summer season Helitack aircraft based at Casterton. It also funds eight remote fire detection cameras at various locations in the forested landscapes of south-east South Australia, and six in south-west Victoria. The cameras are monitored closely and provide crucial support to the more traditional tower-based fire spotter network.

In addition to these innovations, FIBs have highly trained crews, modern trucks and equipment, earth-moving machinery such as dozers and graders, and bulk water tankers, to support agencies combat



bushfires. Although their focus is to protect the plantation estate, they also provide valuable resources to fire agencies to help prevent and suppress bushfires. This means investments in FIBs increases the response and capability of the broader regional firefighting sector.

In addition, forestry industry technical advisers regularly join incident management teams and contribute to incident planning and operations teams. Forestry owners’ conferences are held in October and March to ensure any lessons and recent experiences are captured and shared across the industry and firefighting sector.

**STORY ANDY GOVANSTONE**



# Helping at-risk communities



**During the 2019-20 bushfire season North West Region avoided significant fires, but CFA members observed increased anxiety in sections of the Greater Bendigo community particularly those who had recently settled here from overseas.**

Bendigo is home to more than 4,000 Karen residents, more than 300 Afghan Hazara, and increasing numbers of South Sudanese community members. Bendigo is surrounded by bushland with an extreme fire risk and a high risk of flooding. CFA members realised that these new community members didn't understand the natural risks they faced and didn't know how to access the most appropriate help when needed. A lack of understanding of how emergency services work in Victoria contributed to this dilemma.

With a strong connection to community, Bendigo Health Services partnered with CFA, VICSES and the City of Greater Bendigo to develop a program to increase the community's understanding about bushfire, flood and heat health, and where to find information about these risks.

Crucial to the success of the program was the decision to recruit local, trusted members of the communities as 'community champions' to help deliver the key messages. CFA members, along with other program coordinators, gave education and training to these champions so they could help deliver the messaging. This program truly put the community at the centre of everything we do.

CFA's District 2 community safety presenters and community champions delivered the fire component in the field, and the champions provided continued support to their communities after the face-to-face sessions. The champions were invaluable because of their insight into the best ways to engage the various communities.

The community safety presenters are enthusiastic about the program and they can see real results.

"I've worked with several Karen groups made up of all ages from toddlers to the elderly," presenter Lin Quarrier said. "I've found

the secondary school age kids so supportive and respectful of their families. They helped to install the VicEmergency app on their parent's phones and contributed to the session well."

"The process of working with Bendigo Health Services and VICSES to develop a model of working with community champions to reach the refugee communities has been an invaluable grass roots strategy to enable more effective engagement by CFA with vulnerable people," presenter Sue Bull said.

"We spent quite a bit of time using the VicEmergency app. At the end, one of the older women said via the interpreter 'I feel so empowered'," presenter Rob Reid-Smith said. "Church on Sunday afternoon is a family affair for parents and children. The Karen champions have done well in linking the fire safety sessions with church services."

Participants left the sessions with a greater understanding of the risks.

"I've never seen people getting killed and properties destroyed by bushfires back in my home country," said one community member.

"After attending the bushfire information session, I learned that Australian bushfire is more dangerous than I thought. But now I know what I must do to prepare for bushfire and know where to ask for help when I need it," said another.

At the end of the fire season, the champions were asked to give their feedback so that the program could be improved. Now in its fifth year of delivery, the program's success has been proven. Overall, about 6,000 members of one of the area's most at-risk communities have received fire safety information, and during the 2023-24 season the program reached 2,160 community members at more than 20 sessions.

North West Region is hoping to extend the program to cover home fire safety.

**STORY ROHAN THORNTON**



## Faces of CFA

SANJAN DAWSON, LISMORE FIRE BRIGADE, DISTRICT 6

### **What is your CFA role?**

Captain of Lismore Fire Brigade. Over the years I've held many roles including lieutenant at Skipton Fire Brigade before transferring to Lismore brigade.

### **Why did you join?**

I joined as a Junior with Skipton brigade to compete in the CFA Junior Championships, and from there had the desire to want to help and service the local community.

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

Every incident has had its own impact, whether it's a house fire where a family has lost everything or a vehicle accident where someone's loved ones may have been hurt. One that sticks out to me the most would be my deployment to the 2019-20 bushfires in Gippsland. The devastation and loss of property, wildlife and stock was confronting, let alone the tragic accidents that also happened on the fireground. This eye-opening experience showed me the importance of maintaining awareness around trees when working on a fireground.

### **Who have been your mentors in CFA?**

I have been very fortunate to have many mentors within the brigades I have been a member of, the most influential being my father (Vernon Dawson) and Chris Heywood, who were both previous captains of Skipton brigade.

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

There have been many highlights but one that stands out was when I was presented with a National Emergency Medal for helping to fight the 2019-20 bushfires.

Being elected as Lismore captain is also one of the highlights of my time in CFA. It was a daunting idea at first, but with amazing

support from the brigade and district I think I've been able to lead well and feel privileged to lead Lismore brigade into the future.

### **How do you motivate your brigade members?**

As CFA is a volunteer organisation, I think that all members already have a desire to help and contribute to the local and wider community. Motivating people who are already passionate about something is easy for me. As long as we continue to create a comfortable, friendly and welcoming brigade, we can only hope that our members remain interested and motivated to continue the amazing work they do within the community.

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

Perhaps not so much a lesson as an observation, but I think the most important thing I would pass onto other members is how crucial it is to see CFA members as a team. This team is faced with an array of situations and challenges and therefore we can and will learn best as a team. Although we can all train and grow individually, at the end of the day we head out on a truck as a group and we will come back each time more developed than the last time.

I also want to express to members that opportunities in brigades are endless and if you wish to move into leadership roles eventually, we are all here to help make that happen.

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

Spare time is limited between work and volunteering but I really enjoy being out on the local lakes in the ski boat. Although my skiing and wakeboarding skills may be limited, I always have a good time with friends.

# Large planned burn at Lake Tyers



**CFA's only all-Indigenous fire brigade, Bunjil, supported one of CFA's largest planned burns on the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust (LTAT) at the end of April.**

Bunjil Fire Brigade members helped to prepare the site and identified culturally-significant assets ahead of the 250-hectare burn that will help manage vegetation and reduce bushfire risk on the site which is about 80 per cent forest.

The expansive burn involved more than 80 personnel and 20 vehicles from the south-east, south-west and north-east, and followed recommendations in a bushfire mitigation risk report commissioned in 2018 for the LTAT.

Deputy Chief Officer South East Region Trevor Owen said the burn was important to ensure the safety of the community ahead of the next fire season.

"We recognise that the area is of significant cultural value to the LTAT and the Aboriginal and Indigenous community, so we have been working to make sure we've taken the appropriate steps to protect them and the area," Trevor said.

"We know that during the 2019-20 Gippsland bushfires, the community was concerned about the dense forested area, as it really is only one way in and one way out for them.

"This burn was about working with the Indigenous owners of the land to reduce the fuel risk and fuel loads ahead of future bushfire seasons and ensure we're giving confidence back to the community."

The planned burn was also a good training opportunity for CFA crews.

"Given the scale of this burn, our volunteers have not previously had exposure to a fuel reduction of this size.

This exercise allowed them to practise their skills in a safe and controlled environment," Trevor said.

"It also gave those involved exposure to working on a culturally-significant site where we did all we can to ensure minimal disturbance by avoiding the use of large, tracked vehicles.

"This activity will go a long way to support and protect a better outcome for the community and was a fantastic opportunity to work closely with LTAT to make that happen. It was great having Bunjil brigade members there participating on their land across the two days."

Charmaine Sellings, a firefighter with the brigade and team leader of one of the crews on the day of the burn, said providing local knowledge and supporting this burn went a long way to safeguard the community.

"This burn is significant to us to reduce future bushfire risk. During the 2019-20 bushfires, our land never got burnt but we were evacuated, so our plan is to make it as safe as we can for the community," Charmaine said.

"Three or four of our new recruits were on site in case they were needed and we wrapped trees and raked around them to prepare the area [see photo, right].

"As they are scarred trees, otherwise known as canoe trees, they play an important role in our history. Wrapping them helps protect them for cultural sensitivities as well as crew safety."

Recruitment for the new Bunjil brigade is ongoing after it was established in 2023, and a number of new volunteers from the local community are currently making their way through the recruitment process.





## Shared tanker in District 2

**Sutton Grange & Myrtle Creek Fire Brigade has a satellite station at Myrtle Creek which is strategically positioned as a linchpin in the firefighting networks of the Mount Alexander and Eppalock groups in District 2. This vital satellite station boasts an indispensable support tanker.**

Just over 20 years ago, when Sutton Grange & Myrtle Creek Fire Brigade wanted to replace the existing Myrtle Creek tanker with a new one, the brigade members unfortunately couldn't fund one by themselves. Axe Creek Fire Brigade stepped in and provided 50 per cent of the balance after VESEP funding was granted to buy the Myrtle Creek light tanker. A new satellite station for this tanker was also built.

In the past 20 years this shared tanker has responded to grass and scrub fires (including the 2009 Redesdale fire), structure fires, and vehicle accidents in the local communities surrounding Myrtle Creek. In late October 2023, smoke was reported in the Myrtle Creek area. The Myrtle Creek tanker responded crewed

by members from both Axe Creek and Sutton Grange brigades. On scene they confirmed that the origin of the smoke was a lightning strike and they contained the fire to eight hectares before support brigades arrived to help black out.

The brigades successfully applied for a VESEP grant to replace the Myrtle Creek tanker with a new medium tanker, and brigade members are hopeful they will receive it by the end of this year. This will remain as a shared resource.

Axe Creek brigade has two tankers of its own, but having access to the shared tanker boosts its effectiveness.

"There have been many instances where the Myrtle Creek tanker has been first on-scene and prevented smaller fires escalating into drawn-out events," Axe Creek Fire Brigade Captain Neil Irving-Dusting said. "The location of this tanker is a definite benefit to both Sutton Grange & Myrtle Creek and Axe Creek brigades."

**STORY SAM MOLONEY**

## Operational tutorial videos

**In 2022, thanks to an Enhancing Volunteers grant, District 18 produced a number of videos about operational topics to broaden operational members' firefighting knowledge.**

The videos are not intended to replace competency-based training but are designed to raise awareness in people who may not have undertaken formal courses, or who completed a course some time ago and need a refresher.

The videos cover a range of subjects including incident control, water supply, donning breathing apparatus and fireground management. The videos feature experienced CFA volunteers and senior career officers.

"Much of the information in these videos is the type of information that experienced volunteers would pass onto newer members in the days before CFA delivered nationally-accredited training courses," District 18 Assistant Chief Fire Officer Gavin Wright said.

At a training night, about 15 Irymple Fire Brigade members decided not to use their vehicles because of the hot weather and the possibility of a callout. Instead, brigade Training Officer and 2nd Lieutenant Zoe Brown played three of the operational videos one after the other.

"The videos were so informative," Zoe said. "They addressed issues that we had put on the back burner and they made us think about things we wouldn't normally consider. The 'Common mistakes of incident controllers' video was especially good."

Kalkallo Fire Brigade Second Lieutenant and Training Officer Jason Smith said the videos were useful to complement training sessions.

"The 'donning BA and forcible entry' video has been useful to remind operators of the steps involved, especially for members who have not worn BA in many months," Jason said. "A couple of members have practised donning BA while watching the video to ensure the correct steps are undertaken."

"The 'water supply' and 'relay pumping' videos are a good introduction for sourcing and delivering sufficient water to a fire. A brigade training session would typically start by watching the videos before going out onto the trucks and putting the theory into action."

Yarroweyah Fire Brigade Member Peter Clarkson plans to use the videos to train brigade members.

"I have an interest in training because my job is driver training," Peter said. "I've watched the videos and I think they are simple and well scripted. The range of subjects is good and a lot of our members wouldn't have been exposed to these topics."

You can watch the videos on Members Online: [members.cfa.vic.gov.au/operationalvideos](https://members.cfa.vic.gov.au/operationalvideos).

**STORY DUNCAN RUSSELL**





# Healing a community through bushfire risk reduction

**Wannon is a small town west of Hamilton in the state's west. Its community had differing views on bushfire planning until the introduction of a Community-Based Bushfire Management (CBBM) officer.**

Disagreement over fuel loads and perceived fire risk in local reserves, division between locals and no community cohesiveness, made attempts at community bushfire preparedness difficult.

CBBM is a community development project (and part of the Victorian Government's Safer Together Program) which aims to foster relationships between agencies, community members and local government in an effort to reduce bushfire risk.

In 2019, the CBBM program provided funding to Southern Grampians Shire Council to employ a CBBM officer to work with the Wannon community. The results of the officer's five-month placement were little short of remarkable and the positive community outcomes continue to be felt almost five years after the CBBM project ended.

The CBBM journey helped transform the Wannon residents to work together, including active participation at community events – something that was unthinkable before the program began.

The process included 'listening posts', community information nights (including the use of the SIM table that simulates fire behaviour – pictured above), public field days, site inspections with subject matter experts, wildflower walks, and community working bees. This led to a shared understanding of bushfire risk, and an agreed pathway to reduce the risk was developed with support from agencies and the local council.

The community and agencies developed a vegetation management plan for Wannon bushland reserves. This identified a need to manually reduce the over-abundant hedge wattle bushes, which had spread because of decades without

fuel reduction burning. In turn, this would lead to ecological improvements in the endangered grassy woodland communities.

The vegetation management plan was the catalyst for agencies to significantly reduce the fine-fuel biomass in the reserves. The manual works were funded over three years by CFA's Vegetation Management Program using local contractors. Today community working bees ensure that hedge wattle seedlings are removed annually, with residents adopting shared responsibility.

Secretary of the Wannon-Nigretta Community Group Shirley Bramley put pen to paper in the group's newsletter to applaud the outcomes of the project.

"It is very rewarding after so many years of frustration to see our local Falls Reserve as a woodland, rather than wall-to-wall hedge wattle," Shirley said.

"CFA Vegetation Management Officer Andy Govanstone's friendly manner, knowledge and diplomacy made workshops, listening posts and site visits informative and enjoyable. Although many were very sceptical, Andy's determination and knowledge have produced excellent results with more hopefully to come.

"I wish to acknowledge the Victorian State Government's Safer Together project in partnership with the Southern Grampians Shire Council, for delivering this wonderful result to the Wannon community's reserves. On behalf of the Wannon community, we thank you so very much and look forward to the continued improvement of these unique community assets."

Wannon Hall now fills to the brim each year as Christmas approaches for the community get-together. It's described as Wannon's social event of the year. It never happened before CBBM gave the community the opportunity to work together, to repair and reset with a shared way forward to reduce the bushfire risks.

STORY ANDREW GOVANSTONE



# Supporting the health of both young and older members

**Heart disease is the leading cause of death in Australia, and heart attacks and strokes are the two leading causes of on-duty firefighter deaths. To encourage and support member health, CFA Health Services has been delivering free heart health checks to volunteers for many years through CFA's Health Watch Program.**

It's recommended that Australians over 45 years old should have regular heart health checks. A new model of Medicare-funded heart health checks was recently released called the Cardiovascular Risk Score (CVRS). The CVRS is a screening tool that can detect an individual's risk of having a heart attack or stroke within the next five years. CVRS is available to people aged 45 to 79 (35 to 79 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people).

The Health Watch Program now includes an optional CVRS component for members in the appropriate age brackets, enabling CFA members to have their CVRS completed free of charge.

Following completion of a health check, the team will take the time to explain your results to you on the spot and provide some advice about lifestyle changes you may wish to make to improve your overall health. Montrose Fire Brigade Captain Rob Waters shared his story of turning his health around after participating in Health Watch.

"To my surprise, my results painted a grim picture, placing me in a high-risk category, despite my perception of being quite fit,"

Rob said. "The wake-up call came when I was warned that my eating habits could push me into an extreme risk zone if unchanged.

"I took a 180-degree turn in my diet and made a commitment to improve my fitness over the next year. Fast-forward to the next Health Watch session, and my health indicators had shifted to green, reflecting the positive impact of my lifestyle changes."

Participating in the Health Watch Program is voluntary and is not part of CFA's medical fit for duty referral process. CFA doesn't record any personal information and all results are private and confidential and provided to you in a booklet to take with you and discuss with your own medical professional as needed. You can then bring back the booklet at every subsequent yearly health check to monitor how you've progressed.

Scan the QR code to book a Health Watch session for your brigade.



## **FIT TEENS PROGRAM**

We want to support our young members to be healthy and fit firefighters when they transition to senior members, and then encourage them to continue to maintain their health and fitness as a way of life.

The CFA Fit Kidz Program has been running for almost 20 years, with the aim of encouraging healthy behaviours among our Junior members and

preparing them to become healthy senior brigade members. We have now added a new component to this program to cater to older Junior members. Called Fit TEENS, it includes a suite of health education sessions aimed at high school-aged members.

The session topics cover fuelling, hydrating and exercise, which all provide information about how to become healthy and fit, not only for firefighting but for life.

We've received positive feedback from brigade members who have participated in the Fit Kidz Program in the past and would love to continue to provide these services to our Junior members. If you are looking for a fun, interactive and healthy initiative to run at your brigade, email [healthwatch@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:healthwatch@cfa.vic.gov.au) to book a Fit Kidz session.

Junior brigades are also welcome to participate in our CFA Team Exercise Challenges that run twice a year. The next challenge in September encourages physical activity behaviours as the weather warms up and in preparation for the fire season. Watch out for a story in Member News on [members.vic.gov.au](http://members.vic.gov.au) for more information. You can also join the Health Services closed Facebook group: [facebook.com/groups/250306196493645](https://facebook.com/groups/250306196493645).

**STORY GEORGIA THACKER**



# Water bombing research makes a splash

**Victoria's water bombing aircraft have been put to the test to help determine the best aircraft tank to use in the future.**

Staff from multiple emergency services began research in a field at Balliang in early March to investigate water drop patterns, with further research in April and more planned in spring 2024.

CFA, on behalf of fire management agencies, was commissioned to do the research to better understand what makes one drop different from another so that we can make the most of our suppression tools and strategic investments.

Many factors can impact the effectiveness of a water drop, including weather and atmospheric conditions, aircraft speed, height and altitude, the volume of water to be dropped, the rate it is released, the design of the aircraft delivery system, and engineering.

CFA's Predictive Services Specialist Andy Ackland said it is important we understand the effectiveness of Victoria's firefighting aircraft.

"These experiments look at measuring the performance of the air drops so we literally measured the water drops that came from the aircraft tank as well as the spread pattern, coverage, and the amount of water used so that we can try to understand the effectiveness of wetting the ground and helping to control fires," Andy said.

A Helitak was used to make five water drops over a grid of plastic cups mounted on wooden stakes three metres apart. After each drop the cups were capped with a barcoded lid and transferred to a weighing station where they were scanned and weighed.

"It's good that we can get some objective measurement of the performance of the different aircraft tank designs to use across different fuel types to understand the performance of aircraft in a range of circumstances.



"I'm hoping that later this year we will have some insights into the relative performance of the aircraft. We may still have more aircraft to test next spring, but it's good to have some baseline data.

"CFA scientists can look into the relative performance, and start planning the future fleet and also factors such as positioning and the effectiveness in different parts of the state."

Use this QR code to watch how the research was done.



STORY KATY GALLICCHIO

# Truganina fire brigade's new home

**Members of Truganina Fire Brigade recently celebrated the official opening of their new fire station. The \$4.78 million station is a modern, fit-for-purpose facility which will help the brigade continue to service its fast-growing local community.**

Chief Officer Jason Heffernan said the new station is designed with better volunteer facilities and includes features that adapt to the different needs of the community.

"The new station includes a three-bay drive-through motor room to house three fire trucks, a turnout room and change room areas, a new workshop and office space for volunteers," Jason said.

"The new station will be a comfortable and up-to-date facility for our volunteers to train, turn out and work from.

"We're also confident it will play a positive role in attracting new volunteers to the brigade in the future."

The new building has been designed with numerous sustainability features including water tanks with a total capacity of 45,000 litres, insulation and glazing, a raingarden to filter stormwater before discharging it into a stormwater system, and air conditioning systems that can be deactivated when the rooms are not in use.

It has also been fitted with accessibility features for disability access and gender equity.

Captain Mark Hatton said he'd lobbied hard for a prayer room to be built at the new station.

"I thought it would help us with our recruiting and making our other members feel more comfortable," Mark said. "It's a big step forward to encourage more multiculturalism in volunteering.

"When I first started at CFA, Truganina was a very rural area. I grew up on a farm with horses and cattle, but the demographic has definitely changed over time. The City of Wyndham is the fastest growing municipality in Australia.

"We need to be one step ahead of it and be open and willing to accept all members who represent the community we serve and

make them feel comfortable at all times. My goal is to make the brigade a safe space for everybody."

Mark first started with Truganina Fire Brigade about 19 years ago as a recruit, and has worked his way through the ranks. He took on the role of captain six years ago.

"I get so much out of being captain," Mark said. "I enjoy watching my members succeed and helping them grow into better leaders and better people. I'm like a proud dad!

"I also enjoy the community engagement side of the role and of course fighting fires."

Mark said Truganina brigade had worked hard in the community education space, holding barbecues and taking part in multicultural fundraising events. He believes the diversity of the brigade's membership has helped to make it more approachable because it better reflects the community.

"When we're at an incident members of the public feel a lot more comfortable with us because they've seen us out and about," Mark said.

"We have found through talking to our newer members that some cultures see uniforms as a sign of corruption so that's why it's important for us to do the community stuff. We don't want anyone to feel threatened when firefighters turn up at a job."

The brigade's new home has also been designed and fitted out with flexibility in mind for all its members. For example, there are three workstations which allow brigade members to work or study in the station instead of their normal place of work. This enables the brigade to respond to emergencies faster because if it gets a fire call, members can respond straight away because they're already at the station.

In addition to the main station, there is a new, large vehicle shed which was financed by the brigade and a grant from the Victorian Emergency Services Equipment Program.

**STORY KATY GALLICHO**



# DCO treks to Everest

In March Deputy Chief Officer Fire Risk, Research and Community Preparedness Alen Slijepcevic AFSM trekked about 160 kilometres from Lukla to Mt Everest Base Camp and back again with 25 emergency services personnel and family members. The group raised more than \$37,000 for the Emergency Services Foundation (ESF).

The ESF works to reduce mental harm to emergency services personnel through prevention and early intervention programs. Follow Alen's journey through his daily diary.

**Arrival.** Meet the full team, including two lead guides. We spend a wonderful day in Kathmandu, visiting Hindu and Buddhist sites.

**Day 1.** We fly to Lukla. The flight is only about 40 minutes but is a very interesting experience and not for the faint hearted. Lukla airport has been voted the world's most dangerous in the past. The runway is only about 525 metres long and is surrounded by dramatic, cloud-covered mountains. We hike about six km to Phakding and the first day is done. A little tired but very happy.

**Day 2.** A longer day with the first real climb. We climb from 2,600 metres above sea level to 3,400m. The whole group makes it, so there are many happy faces at Namche Bazaar. We cross five bridges including the famous Hillary Suspension Bridge at a height of 135 metres. On the way we pass many donkeys and yaks and step over a lot of poo and endure the powerful smell of donkey wee. We see many hard-working Nepalese people building better tracks. Despite the back-breaking work, I'm impressed by the incredibly humble and nice locals.

**Day 3.** To help us acclimatise, we climb to almost 3,900m before returning to Namche Bazaar. We get our first glimpse of Mt Everest, called Sagarmatha (Goddess of the Sky) by the locals.

**Day 4.** A 400-metre climb to Khumjung. We are just under 3,900m tonight. We visit Sir Edmund Hillary School and give presents to the kids. Wonderful, happy kids and a great experience. We have a much better view of Everest and visit a Buddhist monastery in which an alleged yeti skull is kept. The group is still cheerful and happy, though it's getting colder and colder.

**Day 5.** Today we trek to Dole, about 10km away and 800m of ascent. The hike is picturesque and we see many animals (wild and domesticated) while walking through forest and see many frozen waterfalls as well. It's the first night we sleep above 4,000m.

**Day 6.** Today is all about the Gokyo Valley. It felt mostly flat but we still gain 400m over 5.4km. In the afternoon we have another acclimatisation hike gaining another 200m in elevation before coming back to Machhermo and freezing accommodation at 4,410m. Beautiful scenery and a view of the 8,200m Mt Cho Oyu.

**Day 7.** We hike from Machhermo to Gokyo Lake. The scenery is spectacular, with views over wonderful peaks, frozen lakes and beautiful streams. After lunch we climb Gokyo Ri (5,357m) to see four peaks at sunset that are over 8,000m. A very tough day but the views are amazing.

**Day 8.** A short three-hour walk to Dragnag over Ngozumpa Glacier, the longest glacier in the Himalayas. It's covered in rocks and dirt making it very tricky to cross.

**Day 9.** A very early start today. We wake up at 3am and leave our accommodation by 4.15am. It's a tough day as we climb from about 4,800m to Cho La Pass that's at 5,420m. We arrive at Dzongla at about 1:30pm. A great success as the whole team gets over the pass. After the climb we put on our crampons and enjoy a walk over a glacier.

**Day 10.** A short walk of about 7km while it snows.

**Day 11.** Another early start (5.30am) walking to our accommodation at Gorakshep. Arrive by 9am. After a short rest we continue towards Everest Base Camp. It's very beautiful walking in the light snow. The whole group of 26 people manages to climb to Everest Base Camp, which is amazing considering most people have a chest infection (Himalayan cough). I'm unaffected and enjoy the experience in full. Tomorrow we start our descent back to Lukla that will take four days. Tonight we sleep at more than 5,000m and it's very cold.

**Day 12.** A small group climbs to the top of Kala Patthar (5,550m), the highest point on the trip. Another 4am start and a hard climb (-15°C with wind chill effect down to -25°C). However, we are rewarded with the most stunning views. After returning to our accommodation and a short break for breakfast, we hike 19km from Gorakshep to Pangboche and drop by almost 1,200m in elevation. Some wonderful scenery on the way down.

**Day 13.** We complete a 14km hike down to Namche Bazaar. We visit Tengboche Monastery which is peaceful. It's also in the perfect position with views over most of the peaks including Everest.

**Day 14.** We complete another 14km hike and descend another 800m. Now we are at 2,600m and it's easy to breathe. My heart rate slows down a lot. We pass many donkey caravans and lots of people going to the base camp.

**Day 15.** After a 8km hike from Phakding to Lukla, we are back where it all started.

It was a hard trek but at the same time very rewarding – amazing scenery, good food and lovely people.



# Home fire safety module updated

National house fire fatality research from 2003 to 2017 found that 62 per cent of fatalities were people with a disability and 36 per cent were people aged over 65 years old. This prompted CFA and FRV to collaborate on ways to reduce these numbers.

One of the major outcomes of this work was the 2022 release of the e-learning module 'Prevent Detect Escape – home fire safety for people at higher risk'. We have had a fantastic response to the module, with more than 3,800 people completing it, including almost 300 CFA members.

One of those members is Seville Brigade Community Safety Coordinator Claire Knowles (pictured). Claire now uses the three pillars of 'prevent', 'detect' and 'escape' in her community engagement activities, including during an afternoon tea hosted by Seville Community House last year.

"We talked to seven community members, clearly older people or those living with disability," Claire said. "We started with a discussion about Prevent Detect Escape, which is all about home fire safety. I can

clearly see the benefits to the community of this conversational approach, led by the individuals. Some people were motivated to install extra smoke alarms themselves, and the brigade was able to assist others with their smoke alarm installations."

Following feedback from people who have completed the e-learning module, we have made some improvements including more self-assessment questions, a clearer smoke alarms section, and conversational scenarios covering hoarding and community resistance to smoke alarms.

Claire plans to run another afternoon tea soon and is looking forward to sharing the updated module.

"The module caters really well for individual needs, and participants are able to apply the lessons to their personal circumstances."

The updated module is now available on the CFA website ([cfa.vic.gov.au/atrisk](http://cfa.vic.gov.au/atrisk)) and we encourage you to complete it if you carry out community engagement.

STORY KELLY STONER



## New partnership helps at-risk households

**CFA has partnered with RACV to launch a Smoke Alarm Installation program that provides free smoke alarms to 500 at-risk households in rural and regional areas across the state.**

Smoke alarms play a critical role in early fire detection and evacuation, yet statistics indicate many homes either do not have enough smoke alarms or have them installed in the wrong areas.

According to a recent RACV poll, 58 per cent of Victorian respondents test their smoke alarms monthly and replace them yearly, while just 24 per cent have upgraded to an interconnected smoke alarm system and 18 per cent don't understand how their smoke alarms work.

The steady increase in fatal house fires starting in bedrooms and sleeping areas, underlines the importance of having working smoke alarms in the right locations in all homes.

CFA Chief Officer Jason Heffernan said it was vital everyone had a working smoke alarm in their homes to prevent house fire fatalities.



"We've seen the devastating results of house fires where there wasn't a working smoke alarm, so this is an important program to ensure we're helping our communities, especially those more vulnerable such as multicultural community members, people with a disability and elderly Victorians," Jason said.

RACV Head of Policy James Williams said the Smoke Alarm Installation program aims to educate Victorians on what they can do to prevent fire risks.

"Through our work with CFA, we aim to address the gaps we know exist in smoke alarm coverage throughout Victorian homes," Mr Williams said. "We believe that every Victorian deserves to feel safe and secure in their own home."

This program also helps our brigades connect and reconnect with their communities while delivering services that make a difference.

STORY ERIN BULMER

# Dereel fire is a new experience for NSW captain

**Aaron Petty was one of the many New South Wales (NSW) Rural Fire Service (RFS) volunteers deployed to support the firefight in Dereel in late February 2024.**

Aaron (pictured) is the captain of Goodhope/Boambolo Bush Fire Brigade located north of Canberra. He's no stranger to challenging fires, having supported the 2003 Canberra fires and the 2013 Cobbler Road fire, west of Yass in NSW.

In February 2024 he was tasked with leading the south-east Strike Team Bravo. This was his first interstate deployment as a strike team leader and despite the challenging circumstances he enjoyed working with Victoria's fire services.

"I was a little nervous but everyone worked seamlessly together," Aaron said. "The mateship from people we had never met before made it even better.

"Every one of the Victorian crews we encountered were so welcoming and the experience was very rewarding.

"After the firefight was over, a resident came up to us in tears because we were able to save her property. She had previously lost her home in a fire and to see her current home untouched was something she just didn't expect.

"Also having the Emergency Management Commissioner talk to us and tell us how appreciative he was of our support was incredibly humbling."

Aaron and his crews understood how unforgiving Victoria's fire season can be and he saw that firsthand when he arrived at the Dereel fire.

"The firefight was intense, made even more challenging by the wind change. Once we got to the pine forest and bushland, it was really fierce but our crews got straight into it," Aaron said.

"We had NSW RFS teams from Yass and Tumut and a new bulk grassland fire truck from NSW which meant we didn't have to worry about water.

"The aerial support was one of the best tools we had. Without it, it would have been a totally different fire.

"One aspect of the firefight that was a great experience for our crews was the level of strategic direction we were given from the minute we arrived.

"I was leading a group of 20 volunteers from Yass, including my wife Adele and



RFS volunteer Brett Lees, who was a group captain from Gunning in NSW. He had been all over the country as a volunteer firefighter on strike teams and was an incredible mentor for me.

"I was grateful for the support of my wife during the trip; she was our scribe for the week and did so much of the paperwork for the deployment.

"I think the most moving moment of my deployment to Victoria was when the captain of Dereel Fire Brigade thanked us for our support, and I could see how emotional it was for him to have us there. It is something that will stay with me forever."

**STORY COURTNEY WALKER**





# Local research, global impact

**In April 2024 the global fire science community gathered to discuss the latest research, practices and future themes at the 7th International Fire Fuels and Behaviour Conference held concurrently in Canberra, Boise Idaho and Tralee Ireland.**

Eleven keynote speakers and 363 presentations were organised in several locations with the theme of 'Fuel, fire and smoke: evolving to meet our climate challenge'. Australasian delegates were treated to more than 100 research presentations from colleagues, peers, research students and industry leaders in Canberra.

Key themes tackled at the Canberra conference included risk modelling, fuel management, emerging technology and approaches, cultural perspectives, human dimensions, and weather and climate.

Opening keynote speaker in Canberra and Boise, Fire Administrator Dr Lori Moore-Merrell (pictured in the main photo) provided global context to the ongoing and increasing challenges facing fire response and management agencies. She outlined the recommendations from the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission's recent report to the US Congress to improve federal policies related to the mitigation, suppression and management of wildfires, and the rehabilitation of land devastated by them.

Dr Lachlan McCaw AFSM drew on his extensive experience as a fire scientist in Western Australia and elsewhere to celebrate fire management achievements over the past 40 years, and to look to the future. Prof Nerilie Abram, Professor in

Climate Science at the Australian National University, spoke about the future of fires and fire ecology, highlighting the impact of climate variability on dangerous fire weather in south-east Australia.

Dr Dean Yibarbuk, Chairman Warddeken Land Management Ltd, presented a highly impactful keynote about the disconnection of First Nations peoples in Western Arnhem Land from their cultural fire practices as a result of colonisation, and their subsequent re-establishment in the past 20 years. Streamed to delegates in Boise, Dr Yibarbuk shared his and the Warddeken Rangers' mission to "share the gift of understanding of fire without fear" with fire managers around Australia and the world.

Professor of Wildlife Conservation, Professor Sarah Legge from Charles Darwin University highlighted the value of small patch burning on species biodiversity through the Pirra Jungku project alongside the Karajarri Rangers on their Country in the Great Sandy Desert in the Western Kimberley region of Western Australia.

The final keynote speaker, Dr Dan Pronk brought a welcome change of pace, focusing on building resilience in people working in high stress, high consequence roles. His unique personal insight into the sustained, ongoing stress and trauma associated with first-response roles, as well as the overwhelming evidence that members of the emergency sector experience higher rates of mental and physical illness, were a timely reminder that everyone in this space is at risk of the effects of high stress and burnout, and can train to build resilience and manage their stress response.



Dr Pronk's three points for resilience impact are:

- Meditation for 10 minutes a day, most days of the week
- Deep, interpersonal relationships and connection
- Sleep and sleep hygiene.

The International Association of Wildland Fire (IAWF) proudly acknowledged CFA Deputy Chief Officer Alen Slijepcevic AFSM (pictured above) with the Distinguished Service Award, recognising his commitment and outstanding contribution to furthering the goals of the Association, including as IAWF President 2018-19.

CFA Vegetation Management Coordinator Andrew Govanstone received the People's Choice Poster Award for his poster 'Healing a Community Through Collaborative Bushfire Risk Reduction'.

Keynote presentations and other select sessions are available at [www.iawf.com](http://www.iawf.com).

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



# Brigades improving community safety

By analysing the data that brigades record in CFA's Community Engagement Activity Reporting Tool (ART), we get an accurate picture about how brigade members are helping their communities to prevent and prepare for fire.

Since ART was improved in July 2023, CFA members have used it to plan and report thousands of activities. The graphic below provides a snapshot of seven aspects of community engagement conducted by CFA members so far this financial year.

Your activity records are included in our reporting to the CFA Board, the Victorian government and the wider Victorian community. This allows us to show how we are treating risk and meeting community needs including those of special interest groups. Brigades can use information in ART in their regular brigade reporting and Section 29 reviews, and to track activities against their community engagement plan.

If you are new to ART, check out the ART page on Members Online ([members.cfa.vic.gov.au/art](https://members.cfa.vic.gov.au/art)), which includes a user guide, a range of resources and FAQs.

## ARE YOU DELIVERING PAVS?

When CFA members visit homes and properties to deliver the Property Advice Visit Service (PAVS), they use a custom-designed digital form in Survey 123.

Version 3.0 of the digital form was introduced last year to better guide PAVS visits and collect valuable information about the property and preparation activities. Version 1.2 will be switched off on 1 July 2024.

If you are yet to use the Survey123 digital form for PAVS or still using Version 1.2, please contact your community engagement coordinator (CEC) or visit the Community Engagement Content Portal – [cfa.vic.gov.au/cecontentportal](https://cfa.vic.gov.au/cecontentportal).

STORY SOFIE ANSELM

**3,145**

Community engagement activities



**499**

Brigades involved in delivering an activity



**2,300**

members involved in an activity



**420**

Community events attended



**2,399**

members involved in an activity



**463**

visits to schools/kinder



**107**

Brigade open days held



# Stawell Fire Brigade

1



2



3



4



5





- 1 The current fire station
- 2 Receiving an Austin pumper, 1964
- 3 First fire station, 1883
- 4 Stawell firefighters, late 1960s
- 5 Brigade members marching, 1955
- 6 Mine training, 2022
- 7 Moyston fire, 2015
- 8 Receiving Dodge pumper, 1931
- 9 Ladies Auxiliary, 1973

# Emergency Memberlink

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

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

Details of the offers and full terms and conditions are at [emergencymemberlink.com.au](http://emergencymemberlink.com.au)

To join Memberlink phone 1800 820 037 or register online at [emergencymemberlink.com.au](http://emergencymemberlink.com.au). You can also access your Memberlink card on the website.

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



- Up to 10% off **eGift cards** including Bunnings, Coles, Woolworths, JB Hi-Fi, Endota Spa, EG Fuel Card and the Ultimate Gift Card range.
- **Westfund Health Insurance** offers a 5% discount plus two-month waiting periods waived on your Extras cover.
- 15% off travel insurance with **InsureandGo**.
- Exclusive pricing on all new vehicles and accessories at **Eastern Subaru**.
- **Subscribe offers** an extra 10% off the listed price of any magazine subscription including 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** offers at least 10% off attractions, zoos and aquariums, Queensland theme parks, and extreme activities.
- 30% discount on **pierre cardin** handbags, wallets, luggage and travel accessories.
- Exclusive discounts on home entertainment, audio, televisions, mobile phones, IT hardware, and fitness trackers through the **JB Hi-Fi Corporate Benefits Program**.
- You and your family members have access to discounts throughout the year at **Specsavers**.
- **Sixt Australia** offers members up to 20% off the best rate of the day on passenger and commercial vehicles.
- Generous savings on **Qantas Club** membership via the Member Benefits Corporate Scheme.
- 15% off the best available rate at **Best Western** Australian and New Zealand properties.
- **Device Deal** in collaboration with **Arlo** has up to 30% discount on Arlo wire-free security cameras and products.
- Special hotel accommodation rates throughout Australia and internationally with **Hotel Planner**.
- Commercial pricing on household appliances and electronics through **The Good Guys Commercial Division**.
- 25% off reset and private bathing, revitalise Bath House bathing and Moonlit bathing during off-peak periods (Mon-Fri outside of public and school holidays) at **Peninsula Hot Springs**.
- Up to 15% off the daily car rental rate with **Europcar**.
- Corporate rates at Melbourne's **Hotel Windsor**.
- **RSEA Safety** offers members 15% off full-priced items instore.
- Travel with **Spirit of Tasmania** and save 5% on adult Spirit and Flexi passenger fares.
- **Nissan Fleet** pricing and other benefits across a select range of new Nissan vehicles.
- Hire a **Britz** campervan and receive 10% off daily hire rates.
- A free small hot McCafe beverage, small soft drink or orange fruit drink with a minimum order of \$4 on presentation of your Emergency Memberlink Card at **McDonald's** restaurants in Victoria.
- 5% to 10% off the best unrestricted rate of the day at **Accor Hotels**.
- Preferred customer savings rate on accommodation at **Choice Hotels Asia-Pac** across Australia.
- **Searoad Ferries** has 10% discount on ferry travel between Sorrento and Queenscliff.
- 20% discount on unlimited ride tickets at **Luna Park Melbourne**.
- Exclusive pricing on household appliances and electronics through **Harvey Norman Groups & Associations Division**.
- Corporate leisure rates and reduced insurance excess on car hire with **Avis**.
- Up to 20% discount on the public website prices of the entire range of **Lenovo** Notebook and Desktop PCs, monitors and accessories.
- Take a further \$50 off the already discounted price on a **Driver Dynamics** Defensive Driving Course.
- 10% off Australian car rentals with **Budget**.
- **The Bridgestone Business Associates Program** has 15% off Bridgestone's website prices of the full range of car, SUV and light van tyres.
- New and existing customers have access to special offers on **Elgas** LPG bottled gas.
- Free membership to **Travellect's** worldwide Travel Club and exclusive packages, special offers and cheapest accommodation prices at hotels and resorts worldwide.
- 20% off flowers from **Petals Network**.



# Brigade

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

PRINT  
POST  
100010934

POSTAGE  
PAID  
AUSTRALIA