

FIRE WISE

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Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria
CFA Rescue Association

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Sharing information and stories to build capability, celebrate, remember and learn

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DISTRICT 16 FIRES CAUSE DEVASTATION

FIRES BROKE OUT IN THE WEST OF THE STATE ON 13 AND 22 FEBRUARY, both days of Total Fire Ban. The blazes occurred in the Mount Buangor State Park near Beaufort – the Bayindeen fire – on 22 February and two in the Grampians National Park – the Bellfield fire – which later impacted the township of Pomonal and – the Mt Stapylton fire – which later impacted the township of Dadswell Bridge. The Grampians National Park fires were caused by dry lightning on 13 February.

In the early stages of all three blazes local CFA crews were joined by numerous strike teams from other districts, as well as numerous aircraft and FFMVic personnel and appliances.

BAYINDEEN FIRE

The Bayindeen fire ignited in bushland east of Ararat and moved quickly fanned by strong northerly winds. Spotting was occurring well ahead of the front, at times up to 10 kilometres ahead.

The ICC was set up at Ballarat.

By late afternoon a huge number of resources were on the fire ground including 1000 firefighting personnel and in excess of 20 aircraft.

There were fears that the impending wind change would cause the out of control blaze to move out of the bush and head for several townships including Beaufort and Raglan. Numerous warnings were put out in the early stages of the incident and it was obvious the fire could not be contained quickly and that it would be a longer duration incident.

The change arrived on the fire ground in the afternoon pushing the new larger head

of the fire toward townships with the blaze moving in a north easterly direction. By 2000 hours the blaze was estimated to have burned around 7000 hectares.

It was an extremely difficult night for ground crews all of which worked in challenging conditions against a destructive fire. Asset protection became a key objective of crews and all did a great job.

It was later confirmed that six homes were lost at Raglan, also numerous outbuildings, sheds, fencing and livestock were also lost. But ground crews and aerial support were credited with saving many, many others according to a statement released by Emergency Management Commissioner **Rick Nugent**.

Strike teams continued to be brought in from every available district to assist with changeover of crews on the fire ground, many arriving the following morning to relieve some of the crews who had been on the fire ground for the best part of 24 hours.

Ground crews, assisted by aerial support, continued with great work in difficult terrain on 23 February as the bushfire continued to burn toward other communities.

Firefighting efforts concentrated on the protection of assets and, in some cases, the construction of containment lines around threatened communities.

The fire had expanded to in excess of 14000 hectares on 23 February.

With more benign conditions experienced for the following few days the objective of operations focussed on protection of assets and also extinguishment of the blaze and stopping its spread as well as construction and strengthening of containment lines. Approximately 700 firefighters were working on the fire-ground.

The short term forecast showed another spike day on 28 February with extreme conditions predicted and although fire managers could see it would be impossible to have the fire contained prior to then it became a priority to achieve as much as possible.

Ground crews continued around the clock, as did water bombing, with all available aircraft on the fire including two from NSW. Through the National Resource Sharing Centre, NSW also deployed five Strike Teams made up of 110 firefighters, on a five day

deployment to Ballarat and Halls Gap. A multi-agency Incident Management Team was also deployed to assist all in preparation for what was potentially an extreme day forecast for 28 February.

It was estimated that containment lines were completed for more than 70 per cent of the Bayindeen fire by that morning with significant burning out activity having taken place. Days leading up to the spike day focused on strengthening the existing containment lines and extending these.

Whilst the weather on 28 February included high temperatures and strong winds containment lines held and spot overs were quickly contained by ground crews and aircraft with both doing some outstanding work.

By Thursday 29 February the Bayindeen fire was listed as contained having burned in excess of 22,000 hectares with containment lines completed around the 179 kilometre perimeter of the fire.

GRAMPIANS FIRES:

Bellfield and Mt Stapylton

Aircraft had access to Lake Bellfield and Lake Wartook throughout the operations which provided a great water source and location for refilling.

An ICC was set up at Horsham.

Initial focus was on asset protection particularly in and around the townships of Pomonal and Dadswells Bridge which were both under threat by early afternoon.

Unfortunately the fire hit the small township of Pomonal (south west of Halls Gap; population 350) with ferocity following a strong wind change and although CFA crews battled to defend assets a total of 45 homes and one commercial property were lost. Numerous outbuildings were also razed.

Pump Competition extended

AUSTRALIAN PUMP INDUSTRIES has decided to extend its competition by another month to give all brigades and groups the opportunity to enter.

The company appreciates it has been an extremely busy time for CFA volunteers with many giving up their time to assist at the devastating fires in the west of the State.

Entries can now be made up until close of business on **Friday 22 March 2024**.

If your brigade or group is yet to submit its entry please take the time to do so before the deadline. You could win an impressive Aussie Captain firefighting pump (see the advertisement below on this page).

Further information on how and where to enter is on page 8 in this edition of 'Fire Wise'.



The Bayindeen blaze threatens a property at Raglan.

Crews also did great work in saving numerous other properties. There was no loss of lives or major injuries with the CFA 'burn over drill' being accredited to protecting one crew on the fire ground (see article on page 3).

As the wind change hit the Mt Stapylton fire it pushed the new head toward Dadswells Bridge which was in the direct path. Crews say the fire left the Grampians and was out in grassland, where the ferocity and speed of the fire was unbelievable.

Some great work by CFA crews and other partner agencies, saw only one house lost at Dadswells Bridge. Although multiple sheds were destroyed, 146 sheep killed as well as countless acres of pastures and fencing destroyed.

Hundreds of CFA crews remained on the fire ground at both blazes overnight with crews continuing on the establishment of containment lines, particularly around private property in the Dadswells Bridge area.

By the following day, 14 February, the Bellfield fire had expanded to 2254 hectares and the Mt Stapylton fire had reached 4132 hectares and efforts of crews and aircraft continued throughout.

Work on containment lines and extinguishments of the fires around Pomonal and Dadswells Bridge continued on both 15 and 16 February with hundreds of firefighters remaining on the fire ground. Neither fires expanded in size

– continued on page 7



Taken on 27 February (the day before the spike day) with ground and air crews working on the north western flank (Ben Nevis Sector, Bayindeen fire) on containment and putting out hot spots. Some of the aircraft drafting from a dam and working in very dusty conditions.

Photo by Jacque Quaine, Forest Fire Management Victoria

GIVING BACK TO THE CFA VOLUNTEERS

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VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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2024 State championships

Final preparations are being made for the 2024 State Championships to be held at the Mooropna Recreation Reserve later this month.

The first weekend of competition on 16 and 17 March, will see the 38 teams from across the state compete in the Urban Junior Championship. The next weekend will see even more action with 47 teams taking part in the Rural Senior Championship on Saturday 23 March and another 38 teams on Sunday 24th March will compete in the Rural Senior Championship. The Urban Senior Championship will also be contested this weekend with 40 teams taking part from all across Victoria.

The popular Torchlight Procession will also take place in Mooropna on the evening of Saturday 23 March, with 46 brigades taking part. If your brigade is interested in marching in the Torchlight Procession, please contact championships@vfbv.com.au as soon as possible.

All of this competition would not be possible without the assistance of the more than 200 judges and officials who volunteer their time and expertise to ensure that each of the Championships is run at a high standard. Both the Urban and Rural competition committees are always on the lookout for additional judges and officials. If you are able to volunteer as a judge or official for any of the State Championships please contact the VFBV office via championships@vfbv.com.au or 9886 1141.

International Women's Day

Each year on March 8 International Women's Day celebrates the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women as well as calling for action to accelerate women's equality.

The theme for International Women's Day this year is #InspireInclusion. This year's theme acknowledges that when we inspire others to understand and value women's inclusion, we forge a better world.

Throughout CFA and VFBV, there are many examples of the contribution women make to our communities and our fire services. The work and decisions being made today to embrace diversity and inclusion will ensure more women are supported and encouraged into the fire

services for future generations.

To each of the dedicated, highly skilled and much appreciated women in CFA and across all fire and emergency services, thank you for the contribution you make to making communities safer today and every day of the year.

Each of us can play a part in actively supporting and embracing equity within our own sphere of influence. This can include simple steps such as challenging stereotypes, calling out discrimination, drawing attention to bias and actively seeking out how to include others within our brigades, workplaces, communities, CFA and the wider emergency services across Victoria.

SOP feedback

A reminder that we are seeking feedback on various Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that our out for consultation. The Driving SOPs will close for feedback shortly. An additional thirteen SOPs have been modified and are now available for review. These are SOP 3.01 Management of Junior Members; 5.05 Use of CFA Equipment; 7.01 Local Procedure Development; 7.05 Water Supplies for Firefighting; 7.07 Station Siren Use; 8.01 Incident Controller and CFA Agency Commander; 8.04 Transfer of Control; 9.13 Keeping Logs and Documents; 9.16 Media Management; and 9.18 Use of Personal Mobile Devices During Incidents.

Thank you

Thank-you to all members who completed this year's VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey. You are helping us make CFA a better place to volunteer.

As soon as we have finished compiling and analysing your responses, we will publish the results.

Given the importance of SOPs in CFA's operational doctrine, VFBV encourages all senior volunteers to make themselves familiar with the proposed changes and provide feedback ASAP.

Please visit the VFBV website to access drafts and change logs to help guide your feedback.

PRESUMPTIVE LEG

QLD is the latest State to expand its firefighter presumptive legislation scheme to pick up the additional cancers added to the Commonwealth scheme in 2022. This now aligns QLD, TAS, WA, NT and ACT, leaving Victoria falling further behind.

VFBV continues pursuing further expansion of the scheme to pick up the remaining six cancers that were added to the Commonwealth's scheme being primary site lung, skin, penile, pancreatic and thyroid cancers and malignant mesothelioma.

VFBV is calling on the Victorian Government to align its scheme to ensure Victorian firefighters enjoy the same protections and support as their federal counterparts, and firefighters in the other State's.

We have published a national overview table on our website that allows members to compare each of the presumptive schemes in operation across the country. As you will see, Victoria is falling behind other jurisdictions. VFBV is seeking the support of all government, opposition and minor party MPs including independents to support the amendments introduced by the Greens, that would see Victoria's scheme expanded to the same 21 cancers that the Tasmanian government has introduced.

Enormity of bushfires

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

It has been an incredibly busy month, both on and off the fireground, and I want to acknowledge the incredible work of all our people in battling the large fires from last month's spike days, including the two catastrophic fire danger ratings declared in Feb. Thank you also to those that supported communities through the storm events of the past month that left many thousands of Victorians without power, some for over a week.

Our Welfare Fund and the VFBV Volunteer Support and Recovery Trust have activated and are supporting members across the fire devastated areas, with six CFA members having lost their homes during last month's fires.

The skill and dedication of our volunteers has been remarked on by many over the past weeks and it is a timely reminder that the regularity of bushfires in Victoria has resulted in volunteer firefighting skills and experience that are simply unmatched anywhere else in the world. And time and time again I have had reports about how local knowledge has been used to quickly mop up spot fires and suppress them before they could take hold. An incredible achievement given the weather conditions.

And while there has been some minor criticism about the warnings issued in the lead up to the days in question, again we must remind the public that Fire Danger warnings are not an estimate of how likely a fire is going to occur on those days but rather the seriousness of the if and when and how a fire would behave should one be started and our capacity to bring it under control. To conflate the leave early warnings with the fact that luckily very few out of control fires actually started on those days is a mistake we must not let take hold. Just ask any bushfire survivor about the importance of early community warnings and you will not be left with any doubt as to their importance.

And while I know many hundreds of volunteers that were prepositioned on these days may feel they did not have much to do, the hundreds that were in situ and could pounce on fire starts from strategic locations with an overwhelming weight of attack when fire did occur is what stopped the various fires from developing any further. So be proud of your sacrifice waiting in hot fire trucks or humid staging areas – it was not for nought even if it felt that way.

For those that did see action - impact assessments demonstrated over and over the incredibly skilled work done by CFA members to protect lives and property. And while there were some losses, considering the areas affected it wasn't just plain luck that there were not more. It was pure skill and incredibly hard work, with surveys of the fire damaged areas showing very prominent fire perimeters around saved properties and clearly visible tyre marks left by CFA tankers as they circled homes and extinguished spot fires around townships

and residential streets.

If we want to talk about luck, let's talk about the chance of a creaking 34 year old fire truck, 14 years past its use by date having zero mechanical problems on the day when the mercury hits 40 and we need it the most. Let's talk about the firefighters sitting on the back in the open air on those hot smouldering days. Those odds are fast evaporating, and the Government is playing a game of Russian roulette each and every year that our trucks get older and older with no replacements in sight. And just to be clear, when you hear a recycled announcement from two years ago promising 40 new trucks, understand it is exactly that – a recycled announcement. With more than 2,300 trucks in the fleet, announcements of 40 new trucks will take another 58 years to replace the fleet.

Returning to February's fires – and while the workforce was overwhelmingly volunteer – I wish to acknowledge the contribution of our partner agencies, especially our friends at Forest Fire Management Victoria who stood shoulder to shoulder with us on the fireground. Thank-you also to all other agency personnel who assisted.

I also want to acknowledge the thousands of volunteers who have put themselves on call or stayed behind or worked from home to ensure local coverage remained. Thank you also to those non-operational personnel who have worked diligently in the background to get everything ready and provided critical support to our frontline operations. You don't appear on a fire report or get counted in the government's figures – but the work you do is essential.

These spike days are a reminder that as one of the most fire prone places on the planet, we don't need to have a bad fire season to have bad fires. A single day with just the right (or wrong) weather conditions can present a very real risk of catastrophic fires.

A lesson the current government would be well advised to remember as they contemplate de-funding our CFA. With a \$3 million cut already applied to CFA's budget this year, the prospect of additional budget cuts in the upcoming budget cycle looms large. As I reported back in January, a secret razor gang from Department Premier and Cabinet, Treasury and Justice have formed an "Emergency Services Organisation Finance Board" whose job it is to recommend further cuts.

To contemplate additional cuts to CFA after the spectacle of fire services reform seems very ill advised and very brave considering how much Victorians rely on CFA to deal with the increasing frequency of natural disasters.

And while I hope with all my might that Victorians won't have to pay the ultimate price of these foolish decisions with their lives, history very clearly demonstrates a

direct link between government investment and the outcomes of catastrophic fire events. If the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission wasn't plain enough, I'm not sure what more warning can be provided on the importance of preserving Victoria's volunteer workforce and service.

I noted in recent days that senior counsel assisting and former Supreme Court Judge - Rear Admiral the Honourable Jack Rush AO RFD KC RAN commenting on the lack of action taken since the 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission on moving overhead electrical cables underground in fire prone areas. The sound of exasperation in his voice was clear as he reflected on the absurdity that just 15 years after the tragedy of Black Saturday that we could so easily forget the effects and enormity of bushfires in Victoria.

He concluded that as a government and as a society for not forcing our government to act, we are remiss and doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past. One wonders how Victorians will react following the next Black Saturday when they discover that funding to CFA and a reduction in the number of support staff and services will be judged. Harshly I hope.

Which leads me to address the absurd statement run out by the government's media team dismissing concerns around the reduction of volunteers over recent years. I kid you not, but the statement "CFA has never drawn on its full reserves of volunteers" is not only the most stupid non-fact ever uttered, but also one of the most disrespectful statements to our brave and selfless volunteer firefighters I have ever heard. And while this statement was first used during fire services reform, it has been on high rotation recently when officials are squirming to respond to concerns about falling volunteer numbers.

When I talk about the importance of respecting volunteers, use this as a prime example of what you should not do.

Statements such as this ignores the very apex principle of volunteer services that you don't treat your volunteer workforce like some disposable cache of on-call employees.

Are they suggesting fathers and mothers are to simply leave the kids at home while both jump on the fire truck? Are they suggesting volunteers, who are also frontline workers across health, transport and other essential industries in their everyday lives, should abandon their posts to attend a fire? Should a volunteer who is battling a cost of living crisis risk losing their job and the roof over their head by not considering their employers situation before responding to an incident? Should they never go on holiday, be unwell or take a leave of absence to look after a sick family member? This is the practical effect of "drawing down" on CFA's full reserves. Shame on them for normalising such a deceitful



and immoral argument. Volunteering should never be exploitative, and asking less people to do more work and make more sacrifice than what they can already sustain is neither fair nor ethical. Yet this is exactly what these statements imply and why they are so offensive.

Volunteer services are built on the principle that you must amass a large number of volunteers to provide coverage, acknowledging not all will be available at the exact same time, and each are balancing their own needs. To run the system into the ground that then guilts what volunteers are left into sacrificing more than they can afford and comes at a great cost to them, their families and their employers is not acceptable.

For example, did SES "draw down" its full complement during last year's floods? Using the government's math - they did not. So why then did we need almost 12,000 CFA deployments to help them out?

In fact, the principle is not only well established for volunteers, but paid firefighting services operates on the principle of a 1:5 ratio that requires it to employ five firefighters for every one firefighter it wants to be on duty. This ratio factors in sickness, sleep, leave and other eventualities. To not consider a similar ratio for its volunteer workforce is outrageous.

The fact that the government spokesperson uttered these statements with a straight face to brush away concerns with volunteer numbers while in the next breath announcing that Victoria had requested 100 NSW RFS volunteers to come down to Victoria to assist with the fire-fight should demonstrate the utter absurdity of the comments.

In fact, this notion of wanting less volunteers is actually government policy – documented in last year's DJCS annual report that actually reduced Victoria's target for emergency management volunteers downwards by another 1,500. Yes - you read that right, they actually reduced their aspirational target to aim for less.

I have yet to see a climate model that predicts fire events will become less frequent and less damaging, so I urge the department to share the data that is providing this unhinged peace of mind so we can all share in its reassurance that we don't have anything to worry about.

Does anyone actually believe that attracting more people to CFA and other volunteer emergency services will be served by cutting funding so that volunteers have to keep battling just to get decent equipment, clothing, fire stations, trucks and support? To borrow a phrase - tell 'em they're dreamin'.

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BUSHFIRE IN STATE’S WEST

by CFA Chief Officer Jason Heffernan

It’s been a very busy four weeks for us operationally and even as I write this we’re preparing for another day of potentially catastrophic conditions to round out the month.

Recently we faced a serious bushfire emergency in the west of the state around Beaufort. About 1,000 firefighters from CFA, Forest Fire Management Victoria and Fire Rescue Victoria worked to defend townships and nearby communities. Strike teams from across the state were sent in as well as additional aerial support from NSW to battle the blaze that covered more than 5,000 hectares.

I thank all members, volunteers and staff, for their incredible response over the last several weeks. All of CFA is thinking of those who are working tirelessly to protect life and property on the front-line and in incident control centres, support and logistics.

Our members said a difficult goodbye to former captain of Portland Fire Brigade and the brigade’s current 4th Lieutenant Garry Mallen who

collapsed while responding to a shed fire on Tuesday 30 January. Despite the best efforts of members and Ambulance Victoria responders, he was unable to be revived.

Garry had been a member of CFA for more than 30 years. Those who knew him and worked alongside him spoke of his leadership, experience and most importantly his support and willingness to mentor others through their own leadership journey. Garry will be greatly missed and we send our heartfelt condolences to his family, friends and colleagues during this tragic time.

As Easter approaches, we look ahead to the Good Friday Appeal. CFA has a long and proud history of being a major fundraising partner. We’ve raised millions of dollars to help the Royal Children’s Hospital deliver world-class care to sick kids over the past 73 years. The involvement of our members, fundraising from fire trucks and at traffic lights across the state has been a hallmark feature of the event for seven decades. CFA has raised more



than \$37 million for the Appeal since 1951.

Another of our great traditions is Champs and I’m stoked it’s just around the corner. This year marks a big milestone for us. It’s 150 years since the first State Championship was held in Melbourne in 1874. The only cancellations have been due to WWI, WWII and the COVID19 pandemic in 2020.

The Mooroopna Recreation Reserve will host the events once again and I am delighted to see so many brigades getting in the spirit and taking part. Good luck to all those competing. May the best brigade win!

WHY BURNOVER TRAINING IS VITAL FOR FIREFIGHTERS

Members of a Eureka Group strike team, who crewed a tanker responding to the Pomonal fire on 13 February, have praised their CFA training as being a major reason behind saving their lives during a burnover incident.

The crew arrived in Pomonal, near the Grampians National Park, at around 1600 hours as part of the strike team, tasked to protecting homes impacted by the fire, when a wind change occurred not long after they were deployed to the fire ground.

Crew Leader **Jarrold Pegg** (Ballarat Fire Brigade) said the blaze went from slow moving and predictable to increasing in height several metres in a very short time.

“We were attacking the fire and the rapid change in wind caused a significant fire wall

to approach our tanker which came over us while we were still out of the truck,” he said. “At that point in time I enacted our burnover protocol at CFA, ensured my crew were in the truck safely, then radioed through a mayday call to our strike team leader to inform them of our situation. From there other units from our strike team approached and assisted in our safety. We had little time to act to the situation but were able to get in the truck safely with minimal injuries.

“Fortunately our training

kicked in. We train for this type of activity, we don’t like to see it and hope it never happens, but we still train for it every season,” Jarrold said.

Jarrold said a burnover was a situation no CFA member wanted to be in, but their training guided them. “A burn over is what we try to avoid, no one wants to be in one. But all across CFA and fire services we practice it. I am comfortable with the training I have received. I had no concerns about what was happening.”

He credited the success not only to the training but his team too.

“All I had to do was inform my team we were going into a burnover and didn’t have to think twice about what was happening next. Everyone played a part in the protection and safety of ourselves.”

After getting medical clearance the strike team decided to continue fighting fires. “I’m proud of my crew, they were very adamant they wanted to get back to the fire ground as soon as they could. They wanted to continue protecting the community they were there to save.

“For me personally, this incident reinforces for volunteers to exist in CFA and continue to support communities, particularly communities during their time of need.”

CFA BRIGADE TRADER FACEBOOK PAGE

The CFA Brigade Trader Facebook page has been running since 2017 and currently has more than 2800 members.

This page has been set up specifically for CURRENT CFA members and their Brigades, to buy, sell, donate or trade their ex-Brigade items amongst other Brigades in the state. The page is managed by CFA South East Region Volunteer Sustainability Team staff and is monitored regularly.

We have had many items listed over the years: from Brigade PPC hooks, to excess tables and chairs, even Brigade-owned vehicles and equipment that are no longer required.

There are only a few general rules that are advertised on the page. But in short: You MUST be a current CFA member and provide your membership number to join the page, articles are generally advertised for trade or free, with exceptions to items of monetary value and must be ex-Brigade owned items. Keep the conversations respectful and of course, Admin reserve the right to moderate posts that do not meet the rules. So, look us up and grab yourself a bargain! For further information, join the page or email us at ser.vst@cfa.vic.gov.au



Pictured following the burnover were from left: Eureka Group Strike Team Leader and Group Officer Alistair Couzens, with crew members involved in the burnover – Jeremy Guley, Brett Marshall, Liam Ryan, Georgia Cook and Deputy Group Officer Jarrold Pegg.

VIDEOS TO ASSIST FEM BRIGADES

A series of videos has been developed to support members who manage the administration of Fire Equipment Maintenance (FEM) in their brigade.

Broken into short topic-specific segments, the 11 videos are designed to help brigades to perform the necessary administration tasks required under FEM.

The videos are also suitable for new FEM technicians looking to understand the administrative component of FEM activity.

“These videos are a visual quick reference guide for managing FEM activity, covering topics such as invoicing, quotes and debt collection,” FEM Manager **Leigh Marsh** said.

“We encourage all new FEM officers to work through these videos as an induction to the role.



“They also provide a great refresher for existing members working in the role and for staff such as BASOs, FOBs, DBMs and Commanders who would like a more in-depth understanding of FEM.”

The videos are available in the FEM SharePoint site, which can be accessed through the CFA intranet and navigating to the Fire Equipment Maintenance page, found under the Brigades / Operational tab.

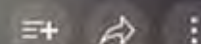
Members can also scan the QR code and be taken to the YouTube page containing the playlist.



FEM Induction

CFA (Country Fire Authority)

11 videos 189 views Last updated on 10 Dec 2023



▶ Play all

↻ Shuffle

A number of videos have been developed to support brigade members who are fulfilling the administrative function of the FEM management in their brigades, as well as newly trained technicians looking to understand the administrative component of the FEM activity.

FIRE WISE

CONTACT DETAILS

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last day of the month

HIGH ANGLE RESCUE KEEPS MONBULK BUSY

Monbulk Fire Brigade's steep angle rope team is also known as District 13 Rope Rescue Team. Membership also includes members from Wandin Brigade. These highly-trained and highly skilled CFA volunteers can, at times, travel up to 150 kilometres away to rescue people from cars, mountains, disused mines and even internal staircases.

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

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

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

Monbulk Fire Brigade's specialists have been operating since around 2003 and there are currently three high-angle operators and 11 steep-angle rope operators.

And what is the difference between high-angle and steep angle rope operators?

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

Maintaining and improving rescue skills is obviously crucial for Captain Schroder and the team.

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

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

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

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

"As we are a road accident rescue team, you may think we mostly rescue people from cars, but the majority of our jobs don't involve cars. We help many hikers in Cathedral Range State Park near Buxton, where there are a lot of vertical rock faces. Rescues here are generally prolonged affairs, a long hike in and out carrying the heavy packs of gear.

"Many of these jobs can be 10 to 12 hours. Occasionally, paramedics have had to camp for the night with patients that we have rescued and get airlifted in the morning due to low visibility and night settling in.

"Given the terrain, it's vir-



Members of Monbulk Fire Brigade's steep angle rescue team at a response in Cathedral Range National Park. The team is often referred to as District 13 Rope Rescue team as it often relies on several members of Wandin Fire Brigade to help form the team of eight or nine members required to respond.

tually impossible to get people out, so the rope rescue team assists them to the top of the cliff or a suitable clearing and a helicopter then takes them to hospital.

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

"We've rescued people and dogs who have fallen at quarries and disused mine shafts. We even rescued a man who

fell off a tall ladder inside a house. The stairway was very narrow, so we had to carry out a rope rescue."

Being a road accident and high-angle rescue brigade, members of Monbulk Fire Brigade's rescue team witness a lot of trauma that can impact each of them.

"We have good access to peer support and most calls also have a roadside debrief where we discuss the issues," Captain Simon said. "It's an opportunity to talk about the incident and how we can do better as a team.

"Major incidents, which often involve multiple agencies, can have an after-action review."

RESCUE BRIGADE MEMBERS MEET WITH CHIEF OFFICER

Daylesford and Hepburn rescue brigade members have met with CFA Chief Officer Jason Heffernan to highlight the importance of road crash rescue brigades and the vital work they do in the community.

This comes just four months after members attended a horrific incident where five people were killed outside a Daylesford hotel.

Recently the brigades did a road crash rescue demonstration, the extraction of a patient, and stepped the CFA Chief Officer through the process.

Captain **Glenn Webster** (Daylesford) said having a rescue unit adds a lot of pressure.

"We do a lot of training. Last month the brigade turned out to six serious car accidents, which is far more than usual.

"Some years are busier than others. We have had a particularly busy year due to potholes in the roads that have caused some driver distraction."

Speaking about the events of 5 November 2023, Glenn

said they don't generally train for mass casualty events like that one.

"I was the officer in charge and tasked the team to split up, find someone who was conscious or was at least breathing and stay with them and keep them alive. Do what they could until more paramedics arrived. The team performed amazingly."

He said the days after were extremely difficult.

"The team was wonderful. They attended public vigils, they attended church services, they held each other up. They held me up when I was struggling. I couldn't ask for a better response from the brigade. Everyone was amazing."

And the community rallied, even leaving the brigade flowers at the station and cooking for them.

"It did take a while for the shock and pain to start to settle down, but I think the community is pretty much back to where it should be now."

Chief Officer Jason Heffernan said rescue units play a vital part in keeping Victorians safe.

"Unfortunately, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of road crashes and fatalities in Victoria. We are fortunate to have such dedicated rescue units like Daylesford, volunteers available day and night, to render assistance to anyone in a road crash," he said.

"I feel safe in the knowledge we have some of the best trained rescue operatives in this state should we ever need them."

CO Heffernan said he

CFA Rescue Association Life Member Medal

The CFA Rescue Association is extremely proud to have finally been able to obtain and deliver the Association Life Medal for its current 29 Life Members.

The medal was struck in 2011, along with the Life Member's Certificate to recognise the work of executive members tenure and exemplary efforts by its members. Due to funding requirements and unsuccessful attempts to fund it has taken until now to become a reality.

The CFA Rescue Association extends its appreciation to member brigades for their dedication and support.

There is no award currently available in CFA to recognise the efforts of CFA Rescue Brigades or its Members.

The Rescue Association appreciates the support of **Kyle Bates** and **Belinda Gillespie** from CFA to enable the award to be recorded in the individual member award records of CFA.

Life members of the CFA Rescue Association to now to be presented with the medals and the year in which they were awarded life membership are as follows –

2011 - **Les Sharp** (Wandin), **Russell Gray** (Dandenong), **Jim Dore** (Dandenong), **Mel Chappel** (Dandenong), **Mick Dorling** (Fish Creek), **Chris Bahn** (Epping), **John Hoffman** (Melton), **Terry Baker** (Casterton), **Alan Ryan** (Werribee), **Peter Hendrickson** (Werribee), **Peter White** (Casterton), **Philip Craig** (Nat Nar Goon), **Craig Lapsley** (former EMV Commissioner), **Kevin Chisholm** (Dandenong, Nar Nar Goon), **Daryl Wells** (Werribee).

2012 - **Brian Messenger** – deceased (Monbulk), **Jim Condon** (Casterton), **Daryl Willison** (Lakes Entrance).

2013 - **George Andrews** (Werribee), **Rob Waterson** (Cohuna).

2016 - **Nev Pulham** (Fish Creek), **John Kennedy** (Loch), **Bill McIntosh** (former CFA).

2017 - **Tim Desmond** (Dromana)

2021 - **Michael Cawthan** (Epping), **Mark Sperling** (EMSR).

2022 - **Adrian Marshman** (Plenty), **Robert Saitta** (Epping), **Joe Aitken** (Dandenong).



Extensive damage at Mirboo North



Storms lashed the State on 13 February with one of the hardest hit communities being Mirboo North. When the town lost reticulated water supply due to storm damage, CFA's State Logistics Centre (SLC) staff and local brigade members rallied.

In the early hours of 14 February the SLC supported DEECA in providing water to the town. A CFA truck was loaded with eight pallets of drinking water and only three hours after the initial call for support was received, 7000 litres of bottled water was with the grateful Mirboo North community.

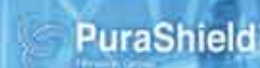
ACFO **Paul Carrigg**, State Agency Commander on the night, said: "While our focus was on multiple emergency events occurring across a broad area of Victoria, once again CFA stood up and delivered to a community in crisis."

The quick response was another great example of how CFA provides a range of vital services to support communities.

The Mirboo North community also received exceptional support from Mirboo North Fire Brigade members, who worked tirelessly. They carried out road rescues, used chainsaws to clear fallen trees to provide access to properties, and carried out welfare checks on residents. Members also helped set up temporary lighting so that the town's water supply could be restored.



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PLANNED BURN PROGRAM REDUCES BUSHFIRE RISK

CFA's planned burn program is used to reduce the bushfire risk to the Victorian community. Implementation of the program reduces the likelihood of ignition of fires, creates fuel reduced areas to improve effectiveness of suppression, reduces the impacts of bushfires and limit their spread.

CFA's vegetation management program is supported by Regional vegetation management teams which assist in the burn planning process as well as obtaining the required approvals and permits. The use of the Regional teams allows CFA volunteers to focus on the critical task of safely delivering the planned burns within their local area.

Given the changing climate and burns often requiring very specific conditions there are ever narrowing times available to deliver planned burns safely and effectively.

CFA has a unique ability to quickly mobilise a skilled and trained workforce of volunteer members to deploy in the form of strike teams and taskforces across the State when significant fire events occur. CFA is now utilising the same process to deploy planned burn resources across the State in the form of the Planned Burn Taskforce.

The Planned Burn Taskforce works by having interested volunteer members register their interest in deploying to planned burns both locally or to regional locations across Victoria.

When regional vegetation management teams can't access local resources members of the taskforce are asked to express their interest in attending the burn. This could be from a single day up to five days with travel. When deployed, members are provided with motel style accommodation and all meals via local catering suppliers.

Participation in the taskforce not only benefits regional Victorian communities in terms of reduced impact of bushfire but also sees an influx of CFA members experiencing some of the

amazing small regional towns around Victoria.

For the planned burn taskforce members, they get to work with fellow volunteers from around the state with similar interests, it is a great opportunity to practice skills and share ideas working with a group of supportive and friendly colleagues.

CFA Commander Planned Burning **Tim McKern** said: "We are really proud of what the Planned Burn Taskforce achieves; they are a committed group of volunteers who see the benefit of completing fuel reduction activities including planned burning.

"CFA couldn't deliver the fuel management program we do without the Planned Burn Taskforce, but it is clear from seeing the members at planned burn events they get so much out of it as well,

forming friendship and enjoying spending time with fellow firefighters from across the state.

"We are actively recruiting new members to the taskforce. If you are interested in attending planned burns either locally or away deployments and are a current operational member of CFA you can complete an application via the CFA intranet or by scanning the QR code below."



FEBRUARY A BUSY MONTH

by Emergency Management Commissioner Rick Nugent



February was a busy month for our emergency services, particularly our CFA volunteers across the state. My thoughts are with all of those impacted by the recent bushfires, storms and power outages.

Firstly, a huge thanks to the many CFA volunteers that supported, and continue to support, our communities across the state throughout these events.

As you know, the challenging weather conditions in February represented the worst fire risk days in Victoria since the 2019-20 fire season.

Despite best efforts, 45 homes and one commercial property were lost in Pomonal as a result of the fires. One property in Dadswells Bridge

FOR SALE: Expressions of interest



2017 Toyota Crew Cab; FCV; 14,000 kilometres; Excellent condition (as new); Full service history; Fully fitted; Four Wheel drive; Fridge, white boards, excellent stowage.

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Late burst of summer

(by Chief Fire Officer Chris



As I write this message, the expected drying cycle has been realised and a late burst of summer has generated hot dry conditions that resulted in several large bushfires in the state's west. In light of these events the first thing I want to do is recognise the communities affected by these fires.

I am so grateful for the support of the community during recent events. Emergencies are a shared responsibility and I thank Victorians for heeding messages about leaving early and keeping away from public land in high fire danger areas. I encourage them to continue to do so, to stay safe and help emergency services during challenging conditions.

The 'we work as one' ethos on display across the sector response to the fires was also humbling and a source of great pride.

The work we have done in successful first attack for fires across the state has undoubtedly saved lives and property. Fire prevention work is critical, and our bushfire risk reduction activities continue in other parts of the state where conditions are appropriate. We have again seen first-hand the positive impact of planned burning and other bushfire risk reduction activities, demonstrated at the Staffordshire Reef fire

on the ground.

It is likely we will see warmer days to come, so stay focused and continue your wonderful work with communities to help prepare them for all emergencies.

Thank you again – for what you have done and continue to do to keep your communities safe.

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where previous fuel reduction helped crews contain that fire.

While I'm always proud of the emergency personnel – from firefighters to IMT personnel – under the Forest Fire Management banner, I also want to call out the CFA volunteers who give up their time to respond to the fires and help with our fire prevention works.

Their commitment to their community is impressive, especially as they were also heavily involved in responding to significant storms across Melbourne and Gippsland in the same month. These storms left significant amounts of debris and hazardous trees to clear, particularly along the Strzelecki Highway. There will now be a power of work in managing the impacts across public land from the storms and fires, as we work to restore critical emergency access and undertake emergency stabilisation and rehabilitation works.

I want those who respond to emergencies to come home to their families. There is a risk we don't prioritise our own safety when the focus is on responding urgently to an emergency. For this reason, I want us all to stop and consider key hazards including vehicle safety, fatigue, and hazardous trees. Working in environments with trees impacted by storm and fire is one of the most dangerous things we do. As I urge my FFMVic crews, I urge you to make sure you are following all precautions and process. Be conscious of your fatigue levels – we all want to help our communities and our teams in times of need, but we don't always understand our true levels of fatigue until the adrenaline wears off. This goes for all roles, whether on the ground, in the air, in an Incident Management Team or other role that supports emergency response efforts.

Thanks and take care of yourselves and each other.

CFA AIMS TO PROTECT HERITAGE IN MANY WAYS

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

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

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

The annual program of vegetation management activities across Victoria includes a range of different treatments. Fuel reduction burning along roadsides, some reserves and private land is the main method of fuel management we undertake, usually in spring or autumn.

Increasingly, CFA supports Traditional Owner groups to carry out cultural burning, which can also help reduce local fire risk. Other methods CFA uses to reduce fire risk include non-burn fuel treatments including mechanical treatments such as mulching or slashing of weedy vegetation, and sometimes biological treatments such as grazing animals to remove and lower

grassy fuels.

Each treatment option has a different level of risk to identified heritage values present within the landscape. To reduce potential damage to any known or recorded values at a site, whether Indigenous or historic origin, steps are taken to identify and protect those identified values.

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

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

"In CFA, as in emergency services more broadly, we do our best to make sure our people on the ground have the best information at hand," Cultural Heritage Adviser **Michael Sherwen** said.

"But we always ask our people in the field to keep their eyes open to the possibility of new finds. For exam-

ple, after the 2020 Budj Bim fires near Heywood, the leaf litter layer was burnt off and revealed previously unknown ancient stone eel traps and stone house sites.

"Another example was at Ruffy after a wildfire. During site rehabilitation works CFA members noticed grooves in rocks.

"Later inspections by Traditional Owners confirmed they were previously unknown axe-grinding grooves, and nearby they found birthing trees and other artefacts. More of our heritage is always being revealed."

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

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

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

The recognised value may also relate to the heritage gates of a parkland reserve,

was also lost and thousands of hectares of land was burnt across the west of the state.

As you know, late last month, the large Bayindeen bushfire spread rapidly to surrounding areas, under strong northerly winds. This fire, coupled with the challenging conditions on 28 February, presented a significant risk to nearby communities.

You all know the importance of planning ahead, so in response to these conditions, we released a potential impact area map as a preparedness tool for communities to take action – to leave bushfire risk areas early.

Six homes have been lost from this fire and impact assessments are ongoing.

We always reflect on the losses, but I would like to acknowledge the significant number of houses saved from the efforts of our amazing personnel on the ground, and in the air. An Air Attack Supervisor working on this fire advised me there were up to 50 houses saved. I am grateful for the commitment and dedication of our emergency services to keep our communities safe.

We also had significant storms last month, which resulted in thousands of people without power. I know many of you have been working with VICSES and others on the clean-up efforts and supporting communities.

I had the opportunity to visit Pomonal, Dadswells Bridge, Cockatoo and Mirboo North, and gain a deeper understanding of the impacts

mining, historic bridges, or an Avenue of Honour viewed as a local or regional landmark and icon.

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

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

DISTRICT 16 FIRES CAUSE DEVASTATION

– from front page

during this time and construction of containment lines was almost complete. Both fires were contained on 17 February although it wasn't until 23 February that these were listed as under control.

Captain **Mat Deans** (Winslow) was a crew leader with a District 5 strike team deployed to Pomonal to assist with asset protection around 1400 hours on 13 February. When they arrived about four kilometres from the township the strike team was confronted by a wall of flames across the road and in the tree tops of roadside trees.

Said Captain Mat: "We cut some fencing and attacked the blaze. After two hours we were able to move on."

"The heat was like nothing I have ever experienced before and the visibility at some stages was very low."

"As we continued toward Pomonal we saw numerous properties that had already burnt to the ground from where the fire had gone through before we arrived."

"We came across a log cabin with the fire approaching. Our strike team worked against the odds but somehow man-

aged to stop the fire only metres from the cabin."

As the fires were burning in the Grampians National Park on 13 February, storms also ripped through eastern Melbourne and Gippsland on that day.

The Victorian State Emergency Service responded to more than 5700 requests for assistance from 13-20 February. SES units, assisted by CFA members in many cases, worked tirelessly to clear trees and assist with building damage from the storms.

The storms resulted in 530,000 homes being left without power and 37 homes deemed uninhabitable.

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Captured in this photograph is the Mt Stapylton fire as it threatens the township of Dadswells Bridge.

Fires caused by car driven on rims

A man has been charged by Police after allegedly driving his car on his rims, sparking spot fires along the side of the road at Buangor.

Police were alerted at around 6.15pm on 25 February, following calls to 000 that a car on its rims was travelling eastbound on the Western

Highway.

Due to the rim's sparks, four separate grass fires were lit along the roadway, which were soon extinguished by local fire crews.

The driver reportedly drove erratically into Beaufort, at times on the wrong side of the

Crews save houses at Dereel fire

A bushfire that started at Dereel in hot and windy conditions at around 6.30pm on 27 February had enormous potential to destroy property and assets.

The fast moving blaze quickly took hold and burned 110 hectares threatening the township of Dereel before being contained by firefighters.

Flames came to within metres of homes and outstanding work by ground crews and aircraft ensured all were successfully protected. At the time of writing it is thought that only a small number of outbuildings were destroyed.

There were 350 firefighters and 60 appliances working in extremely difficult and challenging conditions. Aircraft was used extensively to sup-

port ground crews.

An emergency warning was issued soon after 6.30pm for residents in the communities of Dereel, Corindhap and Rokewood Junction.

A westerly wind change sent the fire toward Mt Mercer during the evening with the 300 firefighters continuing into the night. They were tasked with extinguishing the blaze and the construction of containment lines.

The fire was contained the following day.

Premier **Jacinta Allan** has praised fire crews for their work and outstanding efforts on both the Bayindeen and Dereel fires. "The lower number of properties we have seen damaged, the fact that there has not been, in the case of fires, loss of life, speaks directly to the fact that Victorians are heeding advice not to be present."

As of writing Emergency Management Commissioner **Rick Nugent** said the cause of the Dereel fire was yet to be determined. "We know there was no dry lightning around at the time. The cause is being investigated."

Bushfires on doorstep

Beaufort Fire Brigade was recently fighting the bushfires in Pomonal and just over a week later, the brigade was protecting its own community.

Captain **Tony Neville** said by 10.30am on 22 February a bushfire had started at Buangor and spot fires were close to Beaufort. By 3pm the wind changed.

"Once the wind change came through, the fires got progressively worse. We had our own spot fires, fires in Raglan, which is close by and fires burning towards town," Captain Tony said.

He explained that crews fought on rough terrain that wasn't easily accessible - "good for sheep and that's about it!"

"I am proud of our members and what they did to fight those fires. We also had a lot of support outside our district. People came up from Gippsland, the Peninsula to Whittlesea and South Morang."

CFA members worked tirelessly on the fires over many days.

Tony said when exhaustion kicks in, you get back up and get back into it.

"It was our houses and people we know, that's ultimately why we do it anyway. It's not something we do for pats on the back. We choose to do it because we live in the same community as everyone else."

facebook post from 26 Feb

Beaufort Fire Brigade

Wow what a few days we have all had! Our members have been out fighting fires non stop since the early hours of Thursday morning (22 February) when our pagers went off at 2.30am to respond to a truck fire. It was go, go, go from there.

It's been truly incredible to see so many trucks and volunteers from far and wide coming to help out as well as from every agency.

We would like to say a huge thank you to everyone for their support during this fire event.



A big day for Beaufort Brigade on 22 February which started with a truck fire below at 0200 hours and ended with the Bayindeen fire threatening the township. The brigade is extremely appreciative of all whom assisted in helping save the town.



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MEMBER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM <small>(COUNSELLING)</small>	PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM	CHAPLAINCY PROGRAM	ORGANISATIONAL WELLBEING TEAM
OPTION 1	OPTION 2	OPTION 3	OPTION 4

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Every Group Officer, Group Secretary, Brigade Captain and Secretary receives a copy of *Fire Wise* courtesy of VFBV and Fire Wise without charge. Fire Wise is asking you to supply your email address as soon as possible so that each electronic edition can be emailed to you automatically once published.

Once *Fire Wise* has your email address the electronic monthly editions (January, February, April, May, July, August, October and November) will be sent to you by email as a PDF directly and in a timely manner, avoiding the need to go to the website to read.

It will also allow for your redistribution to other brigade members.

You can rest assured your email will be used by *Fire Wise* for this purpose only.

This request also applies to VFBV State Councillors, District Presidents and VFBV Life Members who are currently receiving a complimentary copy.

There will be no change to printed editions for March, June, September and December and these will include the VFBV Quarterly Supplement.

Your email address should be sent to gordon@fire-wise.com.au noting your full name, position held and name of Group, Brigade or District. Alternatively you can telephone Gordon on 0402 051 412.

Fire Wise also welcomes



Above: The best entry will win the impressive Aussie Fire Captain firefighting pump, valued at \$1600. This will be a valuable piece of equipment for the brigade and community.

Below: Miners Rest Brigade in action on the fireground. The brigade has made a great entry to the competition. Get yours in before the competition closes.

each and every brigade and group to submit items of interest when they have something, whether these be incidents, training, new stations, appliances or equipment, presentations or the like. This can be easily done by contacting Gordon by phone or email to provide the necessary information.

Often a quick interview by phone will be enough to provide the information and photographs would be welcome but need to be email as high resolution jpg files.

If you would like to be placed on a reminder list which gives each monthly deadline please contact Gordon by telephone on 0402 051 412 or email gordon@fire-wise.com.au indicating this is what you would like to do.

Please note that *Fire Wise* is the official publication of Volunteer Fire Brigades' Association (VFBV) and CFA Rescue Association (CFARA).

AUSSIE'S FREE PUMP COMP ENTRY DATE EXTENDED

If your brigade or group hasn't already done so take a few minutes to submit your free entry to Aussie Pumps' competition with a chance to win a free Aussie Captain firefighting pump valued at \$1600. To enter, simply explain in 50 words or less, 'What motivates you to be a CFA volunteer.'

To enter the competition submit your entry to <https://aussiepumps.com.au/cf-a-vic-volunteer-competition-2023-win-a-fire-pump/> by close of business Friday 22 March, 2024. One entry only per brigade or group is permitted.

First prize is a Fire Captain firefighting pump, a top quality Aussie fire pump, part of the company's Red Brigade range, served up with a bright red frame.

The pump is powered by a GX200 6.5 hp Honda engine and delivers 75 metres head and 450 litres per minute. Best of all, it comes with a five year warranty. That's four years longer than any competitor, not just in Australia but in the world.

The Aussie Fire Captain, would be a valuable piece of equipment to any brigade and its community.

Aussie Pumps sends the following heartfelt message.

"Our hearts go out to all involved in fighting fires and we send our sincere thoughts to those members whose families have lost their homes.

"Even though we have extended the competition, we understand there are more important things to consider at the moment, there may only be a few that will be able to enter and we appreciate this.

"All of us here at Aussie Pumps want you to know that we are thinking of you and send our best regards.

"In the future we want to work on a program with all brigades to help educate your communities on the importance of needing a fire plan in their homes."

New entrants in the competition this year have astounded, with three of the quality entries following.

Lowan Sist (Ferntree Gully Fire Brigade) wrote:

"Pride in our community,

our families and our fellow firefighters! The desire to protect these treasures is paramount in our motivations. The lopsided is the reward in long life mateships, challenging ourselves to be ready always and the reflection of that pride in the faces of those whose opinions count."

Taylor Murphy (Rockbank Fire Brigade) wrote:

"The community, the children, the blood that flows through your veins as you turn out knowing you are about to make somebody's day. The smiles and the tears that follow, the faith others have in everything we do. You could play footy, you could build stuff in your shed, but the most rewarding hobby is being a CFA Volunteer."

Robert Ladd (Miners Rest Fire Brigade) wrote:

"My motivation to serve as a volunteer firefighter with the Country Fire Authority burns brightly. It's an unwavering commitment to safeguarding lives, homes, and our environment. This role fuels my deep passion for protecting our community, an honour I deeply embrace."

Christmas Hill Fire Brigade won the previous competition with the following entry submitted by **Liz Mildenhall**.

"Motivated to learn about fire behaviour and suppression after the devastating Black Saturday bushfires, we women joined the Christmas Hills Brigade. Ten years later with more knowledge and skills under our belts we feel our efforts are valued, enjoy the team work and feel safer living in our beautiful bush."



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Is social media helping or hindering?

by CAPTAIN KOALA

As I write this article, we have bushfires burning in various part of the State and elevated fire danger conditions in the west of the State. There have been several bushfires with most of them contained quickly by firefighters with only a couple of them escalating and threatening lives and destroying properties.

There is no doubt that we still have a bit of summer to go, and whilst it started late, the occurrence of elevated fire danger days is likely to continue for the next month or two. Whilst not directly related to this article, it is an opportunity to remind you all to stay focussed on your own health and safety first and foremost. You are not much use to your fellow crew members if you have not looked after yourself and become unwell or injured.

As an avid social media user – yes, I have a Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter) and Tik Tok accounts. I don't use them all regularly, but I have found that they have become a source of up to date information. As their use increases and becomes more popular, the availability of information is increasing.

If you are like me and occasionally search for videos, post or photos of bushfires, new technology, firefighting, and other related information, you will know that the algorithms kick into overdrive. I am certain that you have all had the experience where you have had a conversation about buying something new and half an hour later your Facebook feed is flooded with potential suppliers. Whilst this is annoying, it does indicate the power of the back end systems and I often

wonder are we using them to their full potential when we are trying to obtain fire-ground intelligence and better inform the community of the location of emergencies and what is occurring.

Now I know there will be the anti social media people. Let's explore the negatives and positives.

For the negatives, social media is rapid and quick. This speed can contribute to the rapid spread of unverified information, rumours and false information. This can also support the dissemination of misinformation, that whilst it was likely the right intent, due to the lack of understanding of bushfire behaviour they could be spreading incorrect information.

The use of social media can result in a high volume of messages and requests directed at emergency services. This may strain the available resources required to focus on response efforts. If there is a greater reliance on social media as a trusted source, can we be confident that it is always accessible. As we saw in the recent storm event in Gippsland, with the power shutting down for some time, the availability of mobile phone reception ceased.

Finally for the negatives, there is the very real potential for emotional impact. A person who has evacuated and can't get back to their home, can see images or videos of their house or local area that could have an emotional impact.

For the positives, the ability for incident managers, local residents, community members, those who have evacuated, tourists and a wide range of others to gain real

time updates is significant.

The vast majority of the population has access to a mobile phone and a social media account. Social media also provides a wide reach to get a message out very quickly. Emergency services can reach a broader and more diverse audience that previously thought.

Some of the social media systems will also support a form of two way communication. Individuals can report emergencies, share their experiences, and ask for help or information. Emergency responders can use this feedback to assess the situation and provide more targeted assistance.

During emergencies, individuals often share photos, videos, and first hand accounts on social media platforms. This user-generated content can provide valuable insights for emergency responders, helping them understand the extent of the situation and respond accordingly. Social media is also a quick and efficient way to share critical information such as emergency contact numbers, evacuation routes, and shelter locations. This information can be easily accessible to those in affected areas.

Emergency services can use social media to monitor conversations, trends, and sentiments related to a specific emergency. This data can aid in understanding public concerns, dispelling rumours, and adjusting response strategies accordingly. Finally for the positives, social media platforms are used for crisis mapping, where users contribute information about the location and severity of incidents. This crowd sourced data can be valuable for emergency



VFBV BOARD VACANCIES

Invitation to ALL CFA Volunteers to apply

Closing date for written applications is 2 September 2024

VFBV advances the interests of all Victorian fire brigade volunteers

Vacancies on VFBV Board will arise when the terms of four VFBV Board members expire on 1 October 2024. Of the four members whose terms are expiring, two are eligible for reappointment. VFBV invites applications from any CFA volunteer who is motivated by the prospect of making a difference and believes they have the skills to contribute to the VFBV Board.

The role of a board member involves contributing to VFBV direction, policy determination and monitoring the performance and governance of the Association. This includes actively contributing to policy discussion, consulting with CFA volunteers and contributing to the identification and management of strategic issues.

VFBV is seeking applications from gender and culturally diverse candidates in addition to a diverse range of skills and experience including applications from diverse brigade types and classifications.

Members should familiarise themselves with the VFBV Board member role statement and key selection criteria available from the VFBV website or via the office at (03) 9886 1141.

Applications close on Monday **2 September 2024** and must be lodged to VFBV, 9/24 Lakeside Drive, Burwood East 3151; email vfbv@vfbv.com.au; telephone 9886 1141; fax: 9886 1618.

responders in prioritising their efforts and allocating resources effectively.

The frustration for me now is that CFA and other fire agencies have a large component of their members who are very social media savvy. They use social media daily to check up on family and friends, to communicate with others and, to order their latest purchase or to check out what is happening around town. They can quickly and efficiently communicate a message through social media.

I appreciate CFA has a range of policies and procedures in place around what firefighters can post on social media either their own personal accounts or the fire brigade that they are involved with. The unfortunate downside to this in my view is that we now have a significant number of social media posts that show firefighting aircraft dropping water on a fire edge, drawing water from a water

source or just flying around. These social media posts seem to be supported by CFA and other agencies and are regularly posted on social media accounts.

During the 2019/20 bushfire season we saw the start of an expectation by the community that if they didn't have a helicopter or a large plane buzzing over their house, they believed that they weren't getting the support they deserved. So good is the social media portrayal of aircraft, the expectation has increased significantly. What this has also done, is downgraded the absolute importance of ground based crews and the role they have in extinguishing bushfires.

I genuinely fear that the community is forming a view that aircraft put out bushfires. Don't get me wrong, aircraft have an amazing ability to shape, slow or knock down flames on a bushfire, they don't have the ability to complete the extinguishment

work. This is the role of ground based crews and will likely always be.

Social media has a wide range of benefits and providing we can carefully manage the negatives, I firmly believe it has a place in intelligence gathering, better informing incident managers of the location and activities of bushfires and informing the community of where the bushfire is located and what it is doing. A coordinated effort to use social media for good, can significantly improve the understanding of bushfires by all involved. We can also balance the community views about the role the various equipment and resources plays in extinguishment.

We are now in the 2020s, it is time to better use the technology that is available that will improve safety for firefighters and the community, enable better and much more rapid decision making and communicate a message in a more aligned method that the community expects.

you've earned it

e m e r g e n c y

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We have recently expanded our range of e-gift cards providing members with more choice and **more savings**. These now include major brands such as Bunnings, Harvey Norman, Ikea, Village Cinemas, Endota Spa, EG Fuel Card, RedBalloon, Drummond Golf and the Ultimate e-Gift Card range to name a few. Visit <https://emergencymemberlink.com.au/> On-line Shopping to view these great new additions.



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For information on these or any of your **Emergency Memberlink** benefits, call your Emergency Memberlink team on **1800 820 037** or visit www.emergencymemberlink.com.au

75 YEAR MILESTONE

Cann Valley Fire Brigade celebrated its 75th anniversary last month with more than 40 members, representatives from neighbouring brigades and Orbest Group, District 11 and guests in attendance.

The brigade is actually in its 77th year now with Covid preventing an earlier celebration.

Captain **Ernie Vare** and Lieutenant **Frank Herbert** started proceedings with the unveiling of a new honour board which honours previous Captains, Secretaries and Life Members.

Lieutenant Frank recalled some of the history of the brigade which was formed in the 1930s. He paid tribute to the founding members and some of the long term life members who assisted with compilation of the honour board.

Service medals were presented to **Ian Brownlie** (60 years), **Ian Quick** (55 years), **Peter Stubbs** (25 years), Lieutenant **Frank Herbert**, **Rod Hill**, **Max Kalz** (all 10 years) and **Shaun Mongta**, **Joe Deluca**, **Diniz Ferreira** and **Darcy Stork** (all 5 year certificates).

Peter Stubbs was honoured with a brigade life member-



60 year service medal recipient **Ian Brownlie** (centre) with Captain **Ernie Vare** (left) and CFA Commander **Don Tomkins**.

ship. The winner of the brigade's firefighter of the year was presented to Lieutenant **Peter Willis** for his outstanding commitment to the brigade including his attendance at both incidents and training and ensuring equipment was in great condition.

CFA Commander **Don Tomkins** congratulated the brigade on celebrating 75 years and thanked the current members for their dedicated efforts over the past few years.



Ian Quick was the recipient of a 55 year service medal.



Life Member **Peter Stubbs**

BITE MY QI QI

(by Woman on Fire)

You may not be a fan but the comedy panel show called QI meaning Quite Interesting has been running for a few years and, to me, is sometimes very funny, sometimes informative, and sometimes a bit crazy. But QI also stands for Quality Improvement and is a frequent buzz phrase in

large organisations. I think even at brigade level we can have a go at some quite interesting quality improvement on a small scale.

Do you have a brigade that runs like a well oiled machine, no hiccups, where everyone knows their role perfectly, all systems run smoothly and no equipment fails to work when needed? If this was the case for every brigade across the state, we would probably exceed every service delivery target, and have abundant members to choose from in a crisis, and everyone would have had the training they needed. I'm guessing it isn't the case that everything is perfect.

So how does your brigade monitor and respond to the impediments to ideal performance? Quality improvement has been called a science that can help explore these issues and propose a way of managing the process of doing things better.

The first stage of any problem is to be very clear about what the problem actually is, and what it is not. Lots of problems have a cause that is easy to identify. In some of those cases the fix can be really easy, the solution presents itself without trial and error. A simple example of this kind of problem might be that brigade members frequently forget where things should be stowed in a drawer on an appliance. One easy fix is to create a photograph of a well stowed drawer on that appliance for people to fol-



Please join us in celebrating

125 YEARS OF KORUMBURRA FIRE BRIGADE

21ST OF APRIL, 2024

DOORS OPEN AT 11AM. FOR 12PM LUNCH.
FORMALITIES COMMENCE AT 1.30PM

KORUMBURRA CFA
24 MINE ROAD, KORUMBURRA

PLEASE RSVP BY APRIL 7TH TO
KORUMBURRAFBSecretary@gmail.com

SERVICE AWARDS

10 YEARS	
Lieutenant B. Mills	Wodonga
Member U. Schwarz	Malmesbury
15 YEARS	
Firefighter G. Nagorcka	Ballarat
20 YEARS	
Group Health & Safety G. Peeters	Wodonga
Firefighter R. Downie	Wodonga
Firefighter D. Scott	Ballarat
Firefighter A. Avent	Newham

25 YEARS	
Firefighter A. Muir	Newham
Firefighter B. Campbell	Malmesbury
30 YEARS	
Lieutenant W. Pengelly	Ballarat
35 YEARS	
Firefighter A. Day	Ballarat
40 YEARS	
Member B. Sutton	Newham
45 YEARS	
Member C. Pollard	Wodonga
CFA LIFE MEMBER	
Firefighter G. Nagorcka	Ballarat
Member B. Sutton	Newham

Royal Children's Hospital Good Friday Appeal launch

Easter is just around the corner, which means CFA volunteers are about to hit Victorian streets and rattle tins to fundraise for the annual Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) Good Friday Appeal.

For 73 years, CFA has been a proud major fundraising partner of the Good Friday Appeal, raising in excess of \$37 million since 1951.

Last year, CFA brigades helped raise a massive \$1,606,287 for the appeal by volunteers shaking tins on fire trucks, standing at traffic lights, in camping grounds and at clubs.

CFA Deputy Chief Officer **Alen Slijepcevic** was recently joined by Caroline Springs Fire Brigade members 1st Lieutenant **David Topp** and firefighters **Jake Busutill** and **Stephanie Robson** to help launch the 2024 appeal. They were joined by faces of the appeal **Emily** and **Finley** and their families.

Caroline Springs Fire Brigade has raised \$96,434.47

in total for the Good Friday Appeal, edging closer to the \$100,000 milestone.

Captain **Anthony Jenkins** is the new Collection Group Manager for the brigade. The father-of-five also has a strong connection with the Royal Children's Hospital with one of his daughters helped by the team there.

"At the time my daughter was just 18 months old, had her finger cut off and reattached by the plastics team at the Royal Children's Hospital after an accident with a door. She is now 13 and you'd barely know it's been reattached," he said.

"I am so grateful for the Appeal and the hospital especially after seeing first-hand the good work they do. They make you feel so comfortable

as a parent too."

DCO Slijepcevic said he was extremely proud of CFA's long-standing relationship with the Good Friday Appeal.

"The remarkable thing about our volunteers is that not only do they give up their time to volunteer with CFA, they also happily give their time to fundraise for causes like the Appeal," he said.

"It's a cause close to the hearts of many of our members – whether they were former patients at the hospital or have family who have been touched by the RCH's world-class service.

"We're incredibly proud of our members' continued fundraising efforts and pleased to once again support the Good Friday Appeal in 2024."



Caroline Springs Fire Brigade members **Stephanie Robson**, **Jake Busutill** and **David Topp** with faces of the Royal Children's Hospital Good Friday Appeal **Emily** and **Finley**.

low.

Some problems are not so straight forward. The progress to a fix is less clear, and there may be several possibilities that need to be tried and evaluated. Quality improvement science can help a lot with these problems.

I can offer this simple four step process that is similar to almost every trademarked process taught on QI courses. I'll call this process BITE and explain it here. You might find it useful in your brigade.

The first step is to establish the BASELINE of the problem. This can involve taking careful measures of how often, for how long, or where problems occur. Sometimes we think something is really common, when it isn't. Or sometimes we discover the problem only happens on weekends and never during the week. You can discover a lot when you figure out your current position to clarify the scope of your problem.

The next step is to generate IDEAS to reduce, change or eliminate the problem. All these are possible outcomes depending on how damaging the problem might be. We would probably like to eliminate the risk of really bad health outcomes to people for example. But a small trip hazard might be hard to remove but we can add bright yellow hazard tape while that temporary hazard exists. We may not be able to eliminate hand pinches in a busy brigade, but we can reduce the severity by insisting on and training in the use of gloves as part of personal protective equipment.

The third step is TRY out the ideas. Ideally you should

try out one idea at a time and see how the measures of the problem are changed by the strategy. Give it a little time, and if the change in measures is in the right direction and it is sustained over time, we might decide the idea is a good one. You can choose to stop idea one, and then try another idea and also measure the problem. How you manage this will depend on your intentions and the risks to members and the results of

the trial.

The final step is EVALUATION of all the steps and choosing the best idea to follow up and implement fully. If you have been careful, thoughtful and systematic in approach, you will soon find this technique will lead to a process to follow for the next problem too.

So even though it's not quite a piece of cake, this QI QI is certainly a BITE of cake.

low.

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Celebrating 80 years

Burnbank Fire Brigade has marked its 80 year anniversary with an event to celebrate its history and contribution to the local community.

The brigade was formed in 1944 by a group of farmers and residents from the Evansford and Burnbank districts. It was registered as part of CFA's formation in 1944 and is currently aligned with Pyrenees Group.

Captain **Michael Boord** has been with the brigade in various roles for the last 18 years. Over that time he has collected various photos and documented its history as best he could. About a month out from the brigade's 80th anniversary someone got in touch to let him know the owner of the original Burnbank tanker was looking to sell.

"I couldn't believe it. It just fell into my hands about a month before the anniversary. It was quite bizarre. It was in Raglan about half an hour south of us, so I went and had a look at it and it wasn't in bad shape. It's a 1949 Austin. We all decided to pass the hat around. We made an offer and we were able to get it for \$900. It was a great find."

The original truck was in service until 1988 and is currently parked out the front of the station. The brigade is hoping to add a canopy to protect it from the weather and use the truck for a display.

Captain Michael also managed to get his hands on the original minutes from when the brigade was inception right up until today's date. A photo of the original minutes was printed and framed for the community to see at the event.

Chief Officer **Jason Heffernan** and Deputy Chief Officer **Brett Boatman** joined the brigade at its milestone celebrations. The Chief Officer said: "I couldn't be more proud of the hard work and dedication of our Burnbank Brigade members and I have no doubt CFA will continue to have a strong community presence in Burnbank for the next 80 years."



cfa.vic.gov.au



Supporting our volunteers

Resources to engage industry

New resources have been developed to support brigades to engage with industry and commercial business owners about fire safety and their legal obligation to keep people safe from fire.

The six Building Essential Fire Safety Measures information sheets cover the requirements for, and use of, portable firefighting equipment including extinguishers, hose reels and fire blankets. They also include information specific to building owner/occupiers about the requirements to maintain building safety measures and the installation of fire detection and alarm systems, fire doors, emergency lighting and fire hydrants.

The information sheets can be printed and given to building owners and industry contacts. Many include QR code links to live video demonstrations.

“These resources are designed to not only increase awareness of fire safety requirements among business and industry but to assist our members, including those who provide Fire Equipment Maintenance services, to reinforce this important fire safety information when working in their communities,” Head of Community Infrastructure Andrew Andreou said.

The information sheets are available at cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/building-planning-regulations/fire-equipment-maintenance or the CFA Community Engagement Content Portal – cfa.vic.gov.au/cecontentportal.



Improvements to MyCFA

CFA's 'MyCFA' email platform is introducing a Preference Centre which encourages subscribers to nominate their areas of interest, based on their personal or professional circumstances, to receive tailored information.

Created in 2015, MyCFA has been sending subscribers place-based notifications on Fire Danger Periods and Total Fire Bans, as well as general information and advice about seasonal fire safety themes.

There are 27,000 people signed up to MyCFA who currently receive up to six emails a year.

Previously, all subscribers received the same general information depending on their location, but the enhancements of MyCFA to include a preference centre will help CFA better tailor information to individual circumstances.

Paul Harris, Team Leader Community Engagement and Program Development, was one of the original architects of MyCFA. He said the idea behind the service was to create long-term relationships with individuals and the communities CFA serves.

“The aim was to move from a purely transactional interaction with individuals to a more relational experience with tailored touchpoints and interactions on an ongoing basis,” Paul said.

With the launch of the Preference Centre, Sally Pickering, General Manager, Communications and Stakeholder Relations, believes this relational experience will grow and be strengthened for subscribers.

“New and existing subscribers can customise and select their topics of interest and MyCFA will send them curated content based on these themes,” Sally said. “Receiving emails from MyCFA will become a much more personalised experience depending on subscribers’ interests.”

Current subscribers will soon receive an email asking them to update their preferences via their existing MyCFA profile. New subscribers will undertake a two-step process to sign up to MyCFA.

CFA encourages local brigades to help build up our database of subscribers by signing up community members. This will enable us to build more accurate profiles of our local communities. For help go to members.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa or look out for an email in coming weeks.

CFA's commitment to Pride March

For the ninth consecutive year, CFA members have taken part in the annual Midsumma Pride March. The event, which runs as part of the Midsumma Festival, is an opportunity to proudly demonstrate the organisation's commitment and support to the LGBTQAI+ community and to reaffirm its position as an inclusive and welcoming organisation.

A number of CFA members took part in the event alongside emergency service colleagues, marching to support CFA's LGBTQAI+ colleagues, friends and family members.

CFA General Manager – Infrastructure Services **Paul Santamaria** was one of these participants.

"CFA is a leading organisation in the community, and being a leader in our organisation means it's important to show how CFA works to embrace and include all members of CFA and the communities we serve," he said.

"We're made up of so many different people from so many different identities and

it's so important to make CFA a welcoming and inclusive space for everyone."

Paul said events such as Midsumma Pride March are a great opportunity to learn and network.

"Taking part in events such as these are a great way to meet people from across the state, and also from our emergency services partner organisations," he said.

"It's really important to me that I continue to learn from people with different identities, backgrounds and histories – it makes us a more inclusive organisation."

Paul said all of us can work toward creating a safer and more inclusive CFA by being

willing to learn.

"We can be better allies to the LGBTQAI+ community by being willing to listen and engage, being willing to have a conversation and learn a bit more than you didn't know the day before.

"It helps you develop as a person and helps you to build a shared learning and understanding, and helps others feel supported and included."

CFA aims to create and maintain a safe, respectful and inclusive environment that enables all people to reach their full potential and thrive. To find out more about CFA's work in the diversity and inclusion space, visit the website.



Apply to attend the 2024 CFA Cadet Camp

CFA Cadet camps for 16 and 17-year-old CFA members were launched in 2019 and have been held with great success over the years. Applications to be a part of this year's camp have now opened.

These camps bring CFA's youngest senior members together to enhance their fire-fighting skills and knowledge and give them some practical, hands-on fire training. The youngsters also gain teamwork and leadership skills.

Camps are free to attend and applications are now open for the 2024 camps. CFA encourages its members who will be 16 or 17 years old during the camp dates to sign up.

It doesn't matter what your current level of training is - whether you've finished the General Firefighter training or just started. All levels are welcome.

If you have attended a previous camp you can attend another, although priority is given to those who haven't been to one.

The 2024 camp will be held from 31 May 2024 to 2 June

2024 at Lady Northcote Discovery Camp, Glenmore and is open to 16 and 17-year-old members (born between 3/6/2006 and 31/05/2008).

Applications can be made at <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/7a5d399db13046a1adf83bb23cf39b01>

Applications close 29 March 2024 with all applicants emailed with an outcome on 5 April.



BE A REGULAR READER

"Fire Wise", published monthly, contains a variety of information of value and interest to personnel of the fire service. Quarterly editions, including the VFBV Quarterly Supplement will be mailed to the address nominated, whilst the other eight electronic editions will be emailed to the email address provided, this being the subscription for 12 months. Cost \$37 (interstate subscribers \$45). Please contact the office on 0402 051 412, email gordon@fire-wise.com.au or order online at www.fire-wise.com.au

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FOR SALE BY TENDER

Lakes Entrance Fire Brigade is selling two competition aluminium ladders and ladder staging plus jacks (purchaser to transport).

The brigade is happy to sell these separately.

COSTS

Ladders \$450.00 each or nearest offer
 Ladder Staging \$500.00 or nearest offer

CONTACT

Geof Bassett 0427 882 422 or
 Daryl Willison 0428 585 185



VALE ANTHONY WATT

The many friends and CFA colleagues, and all in District 5, were deeply saddened to hear of the passing of Anthony Watt following a period of illness.

Anthony, or Watty as he was affectionately known by all who knew him, joined CFA in October 1967 serving continuously with Gringe Fire Brigade until his passing in late January. During this time he was a key member of the brigade and was elected Captain for six years (1994-2000). In addition Watty served as Lieutenant for 12 years and Apparatus Officer for four years. He was recognised by his peers for his strong but fair leadership. He also held the position of Brigade Community Safety Officer from 2016 up until his passing.

This extended across to Balmoral Group where Watty spent many years as an officer. He led as Group Officer for six years (1998-2004) and served as a DGO for a total of 14 years.

An operational firefighter for his entire service he, as recently as a couple of months ago, attended a small grass fire at Gringe even though he was seriously ill and frail. Such was his commitment and dedication to the brigade and community.

With a passion for training he also held the position of Training Officer in both Gringe Brigade and Balmoral Group for extended periods.

He also represented Gringe Brigade and District 5 with VFBV, and was a highly valued member of the District Planning Committee (DPC) during his service.

Watty became a CFA employee in District 5 where he was employed as the Vegetation Management Officer for 15 years, working closely with Groups and brigades in this area and building a mutual respect. During this time he was pivotal in the development of CFA's Vegetation Management Program Statewide providing leader-

ship through the old Road and Rail Program, supporting CFA's Royal Commission response and providing expertise across the state.

In addition to this he was a passionate influencer of state and federal policy around Fire Management and environmental policy. He was known both within the fire services but also within the environmental industry as an advocate of native grassland management and for championing how fire management and

biodiversity outcomes can be achieved effectively.

During this time Watty was pivotal in working with academic institutions, land management authorities and local environmental groups in leading research into ecologically, responsible fire management and changing attitudes and practices that have had national implications.

Watty will be sorely missed by family, friends, CFA colleagues and staff, and the community alike.

SASSAFRAS MOURNS ITS MATRIARCH, GWEN

The community of Sassafras and surrounds is mourning the death of a much-loved matriarch, Gwen Horner, who died recently aged 92.

A life member of Sassafras-Ferny Creek Fire Brigade, Gwen's involvement with CFA began with her marriage almost 70 years ago to the late Bob Horner AFSM.

Born Gwennyth Helen Dyer in December 1931, she grew up in Tremont in the Dandenong Ranges, where her father was a flower grower. She met Bob at a dance in Olinda in 1950 and they were married at the Sassafras Methodist Church in 1954. So began a lifetime's association with the local brigade which Bob had joined in the same year.

The 1950s was a very different era when it came to the involvement of women in the local fire brigade (full membership of CFA for women would not come until the 1970s). At first it was quite informal. Gwen was among a group of local women, who supported the brigade through catering or donations of food.

In June 1965, a "Ladies Aux-

iliary" was formed under the leadership of Jean Allen and Gwen was among the first to join. According to the brigade minutes of the day, the auxiliary could only be activated on the command of the brigade Captain or officer in charge of a fire.

Still, it was a long way from the days when then Captain Keith Hughson would carry his own flask of water and, if it looked like being a long fire, a tin of fruit!

Gwen became a stalwart of the auxiliary, turning out to assist with catering at major and not-so-major fires, assisting with the catering for countless brigade functions, holding office within the auxiliary itself, acting as a coordinator, a delegate to brigade meetings and to the Dandenong Ranges Feeding Group.

She was made a life member of the brigade in 2010 in acknowledgement of her service to the auxiliary. In 2022, CFA Chief Officer Jason Heffernan presented Gwen with a medal marking 30 years of registered service.

Gwen was widely known in the local community through her involvement with several organisations, but most notably the Ferny Creek Tennis Club of which she was made a life member in 1981. Nimble on the court, Gwen played competitive tennis well into her senior years.

She was also a diligent member of the local branches of the CWA and the Red Cross, the Mt Dandenong and District Historical Society and an active parishioner of the Kennon Memorial Church in Sassafras.

Gwen is survived by four children, eight grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. Bob died in August 2023.

Left: Gwen Horner being presented with a 30 year service medal in 2022 by Chief Officer Jason Heffernan.

