



VFBV

VOLUNTEER FIRE  
BRIGADES VICTORIA

## **2 Minute Briefings June 2020**

The 2 Minute Briefings are a quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

They are intended to update members on key issues that have recently been discussed. Effort is made to include any related items that may have been progressed out of session or through other avenues that are related to each committee's subject matter. Priority is given to topics where recent progress has been made. Topics where no progress has been made or where there are differences of opinion are sometimes included to ensure members are aware of VFBV efforts in continuing to advocate for progress or outcomes.

Joint Committees are formal committees between CFA and VFBV made up of VFBV delegates appointed by VFBV State Council, and CFA management representatives appointed by CFA. They are a critical loop in our consultative structures. They endeavour to work collaboratively and cooperatively on issues but may also be required to escalate issues where resolution or common ground cannot be found - requiring executive attention.

# Joint Communications & Technology Committee

2 Minute Briefing



June 2020

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

## DIGITAL RADIO UPGRADE PROGRESS

CFA have advised delegates on the Joint Communications and Technology Committee that all four outer metropolitan districts (Districts 7, 8, 13 and 14) continue to operate on the digital channels, however due to continuing works to resolve reception issues they are still being patched to the analogue channels. Fireground channels are not being automatically allocated due to similar problems identified through observation reports.

CFA has reported to the committee that Telstra continue to focus on work dedicated on fixing the outstanding issues. Telstra have installed a new tower at Hastings which is due to come on-line shortly, and temporary works are being evaluated for Frankston. The committee will continue to monitor.

## RESOURCE TRACKING SYSTEM (RTS)

In last year's May edition of the 2 Minute Briefings, members were advised of an issue with the GPS reception on mobile radios due to the re-setting of the clock system on GPS satellites. The Committee would like to again remind members with bag radios that haven't had their GPS antenna re-flashed to contact their District Office and organise to have this work completed.

Both the CFA and the Joint Committee members are also interested in hearing feedback from users about their experiences with the Resource Tracking System (RTS). Any suggested improvements or enhancements of the RTS can be forwarded to the CFA IT Service desk (03 9262 8207) or VFBV Support Officer Peter Sharman (p.sharman@vfbv.com.au).

## SUPPLEMENTARY ALERTING SYSTEM (SAS)

VFBV delegates to the Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) Supplementary Alert System (SAS) working party have reported that limited tests on the latest version of the system have been underway. Delegates to the Joint Committee were informed that the mapping component of the SAS performed well, however the working party is looking forward to the use and testing of the system with actual data during the next month.

ESTA has commenced work on the data transfer component and expect to have this completed in June or July, in line with the 2020 release timeline. Once the data transfer is completed there will be some further testing by the SAS working party to ensure there is a high level of confidence before the expected rollout prior to the next fire season.

## SPECTRUM REPLACEMENT – ADTEC CONFERENCING SYSTEM

The replacement of the spectrum system has occurred across the State and brigades have commenced using the AdTec conference system in its place. VFBV is encouraging members to provide feedback and would like to hear from individuals, groups and brigades who have used the new system since its introduction.

Initial feedback has highlighted problems such as when the initial caller hangs up, the line is disconnected automatically which in turns doesn't allow for Brigade members on the line to continue the discussion and plan their next step.

Other issues reported are when the initial message is presented to indicate you have a conference call, it only plays the pre-recorded message once, causing members missing this message to not know when to enter their pin.

Brigade/Group Communications Officers are asked to monitor the new system and forward any difficulties or adverse changes experienced to VFBV Support Officer Peter Sharman (p.sharman@vfbv.com.au).

# Joint Community Safety Committee

2 Minute Briefing



June 2020

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

## IFMP – INTEGRATED FIRE MANAGEMENT PLANNING

VFBV continues to advocate the importance of CFA volunteer representation and input into fire management planning across Victoria. In previous updates we have reported that legislation changes have removed mandatory volunteer brigade and group representation and replaced Municipal Fire Prevention Committee's (MFPC's) with new Emergency Management Planning Committee's. Pleasingly, some municipalities have chosen to keep their fire prevention committee's by making them a subcommittee of the new overarching body, but this needs to be negotiated with each individual local government area.

To assist brigades to have input into these meetings, the Joint Community Safety Committee delegates have requested CFA develop guidelines to provide consistency. Where CFA decides to only appoint a CFA employee to represent CFA in these forums, delegates have requested CFA provide a mandatory consultation process to ensure these representatives are well informed by the local brigades and groups, and that information is then also passed back from the committee to the volunteers at the local level.

CFA has now completed the draft guidelines which have now been sent to all Groups, District and Regions for feedback. The drafts include a proposed fire prevention escalation process, municipal fire management planning guideline for CFA members 2020, and a proposed guide to CFA participation in municipal fire management planning.

The committee is urging volunteers to review these drafts and provide feedback as soon as possible. The intent of these guidelines is to improve the opportunities for group and brigade input into fire management planning and ensure volunteers feel confident to raise matters of importance to the new planning committee's. Feedback on the draft documents can be emailed to VFBV Support Officer Michelle Ryan – [m.ryan@vfbv.com.au](mailto:m.ryan@vfbv.com.au)

## RESIDENTIAL SPRINKLER SYSTEMS UPDATE

VFBV delegates continue to monitor the exciting progress being made to promote residential sprinkler systems. Good progress appears to have been made in our pursuit for an Australia Wide national approach. Through collaboration with AFAC and the FPAA, government regulators continue to implement changes to legislation.

The national construction code (NCC) and building codes have been updated and became effective as of the 1st May 2020. As previously reported these changes mandate effective, safe, fit for purpose sprinkler systems for medium-rise residential buildings 4 stories and over. New buildings of these heights will now be required to have working sprinkler protection systems installed.

Independent analysis of the installation of residential sprinkler systems has determined that a sprinkler system can reduce the occupants risk level by at least 67%. The introduction of sprinklers into buildings provides a significant improvement to the safety of occupants, will save lives and reduce damage to property. To date adding a sprinkler system to residential housing was seen to be cost prohibitive. New systems designed to the new FPAA101D technical specifications draw water from the existing plumbing and building water supply for residential buildings and offers significant cost savings. New systems have been tested that are designed for use with already available Watermark certified products, which comply with the standard that has been designed to test any product that comes in contact with drinking water.

The system specifications have been designed to provide enough water volume to sprinkler heads in order to achieve safe evacuation and assist with fire service intervention. Because the system is connected to the drinking water supply, water availability is regularly monitored through residents' use of existing water fixtures.

# Joint Equipment and Infrastructure Committee

2 Minute Briefing



June 2020

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

## FCV PURCHASING CONCERNS

Discussions are continuing between VFBV and CFA over volunteer concerns regarding CFA's decision to not support brigades purchasing brigade-owned vehicles from local car dealerships, in particular forward command vehicles (FCV's). Brigades are reporting to delegates that CFA will no longer allow Brigades to purchase FCV's from their local automotive dealers. Concerns stem from the fact that many local car dealers are great supporters of volunteer fire brigades and often provide discounts and incentives for the local brigade as well as many of the dealerships employees being active brigade members and an important part of the local town and community as they provide employment to many smaller communities.

CFA have told the committee the cab chassis purchases particularly the Ford Ranger XL 4x4 crew cabs used for FCV's are now undertaken in accordance with Government purchasing protocols via arrangements with an external fleet provider and case-by-case local purchasing is not practical for large volume purchases that are managed centrally. Furthermore, CFA's position is that centralised purchasing of cab chassis results in a better financial outcome for CFA and brigades.

Delegates are continuing to express concerns on behalf of brigades who do not agree and have explained that many are now concerned that they may have to travel several hours to get their FCV serviced, as the local dealer may not be allowed to do this type of work at the local workshop under terms of the fleet provider. The committee will continue to discuss this matter with CFA in the hope that the many benefits of supporting local communities with the locally purchasing of FCV's can be better understood by CFA and that purchasing arrangements can be made more flexible to ensure greater support and benefit for local towns and communities.

## BRIGADE OWNED TRAILER CHECK REMINDER

Brigade owned trailers continues to be a topic of significant discussion. During 2018 CFA carried out an audit of brigade owned trailers and found a number to be operationally deficient. Further checks continued during 2019, and a number of trailers continue to be found to be non-compliant. Members are urged to inspect their brigade owned trailers and check for any significant structural rust, bald tyres, blown lights or other deflections that would result in the trailer being unroadworthy and unsafe to use.

During these checks CFA has also found that some trailers were also not listed as brigade assets and therefore uninsured. While disappointed that CFA has not picked up these issues as part of its annual Section 29 process, the committee are urging brigades to please ensure their brigade owned trailers are routinely checked to ensure they are safe to use and comply with VicRoads roadworthy requirements. Brigades also need to ensure the trailers are listed in the brigade assets register and that District Headquarters are made aware, so the insurance is up to date. CFA have advised an Operations Bulletin will soon be circulated to brigades outlining the maintenance and safety checks required to ensure compliance with Vic Roads and CFA policies.

## FOAM MANAGEMENT

VFBV delegates to the Joint Equipment and Infrastructure Committee continue to regularly monitor the environmental and safety considerations of firefighting foams. Members should be aware of the potential harm that firefighter foams can have if incorrectly mixed or older non approved foams are allowed to enter the system. CFA has provided the committee with a draft Operations Bulletin for the management and disposal of firefighting foams for feedback. The bulletin covers the environmental and safety considerations when using firefighting foams and covers the approved foams, operational and safety considerations for members, appliances and the environment and the management of residual PFAS in the system. The bulletin also reminds members of the actions to take in the use, storage and safety measures required when handling all firefighting foams. Only approved foam can be used, and any non-compliant foams must be reported to the district headquarters for immediate pickup and disposal.

# Joint HR, Welfare and OH&S Committee

2 Minute Briefing



June 2020

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

## COVID 19 WELLBEING SERVICES

The Joint HR, Welfare and OH&S Committee discussed CFA's plan and intention to maintain current member wellbeing services such as the member assistance program, chaplaincy and peer support services by developing additional 'opt in' services by which people can access these services over the phone during lockdown and social distancing restrictions. In addition, CFA will proactively contact any members who have contracted the corona virus, and who are required to quarantine. This will also be extended to those who are caring for others with the illness in order to offer ongoing phone support and/or referral to other services. VFBV delegates have requested additional targeted assistance be considered for the recent fire affected areas in East Gippsland and the North East, where volunteers already impacted by fire are further disadvantaged during the pandemic. CFA has agreed.

Delegates shared with CFA some practices that were working very well at the local level where regular weekly video/teleconferences are being held between Group Officers and Brigade Captains with Peers invited to attend. Delegates urged CFA to increase messaging to brigades and volunteers explaining the simplicity of teleconferencing and how to access CFA systems, as it can be perceived by some as complicated. Delegates have also requested BASOs or Operations Staff could offer to run a teleconference for those brigades who had not had any contact to date. CFA has agreed to request the CFA Pandemic Management Team to 'pulse check' across the Districts and to post on Brigades Online some examples of what is working well for some districts and brigades to make members aware of the options available.

## CFA DISCIPLINE PROCESS

VFBV regularly support volunteers navigating the CFA discipline process and continue to be alarmed to learn of punitive measures enforced upon volunteers who have been suspended or stood down, in recent times. Delegates informed CFA of a recent case where a volunteer was restricted from speaking to any members of their brigade, to attend any CFA property or engage in any CFA activity. This volunteer took the letter literally and as a result did not take up a travel opportunity with their partner and son, didn't speak to family and close friends and was forbidden from attending the wake of a long serving, beloved member of the brigade. In small communities like this one, the repercussions and social isolation for this volunteer were debilitating. VFBV believe these measures encroach on a volunteer to such a degree as to deny them their civil rights and have requested urgent review. CFA has accepted the delegates view that these restrictions are excessive and that future restrictions placed upon a volunteer should only relate to specific CFA business restricted to the allegation or matter at hand. It is VFBV's view that CFA have no right to say who a volunteer can or can't talk to or where a volunteer can or can't go (with the exception of a CFA property) and these kind of punitive measures can seriously impact a members mental health and wellbeing, resulting in significant social isolation and harm.

## WORKING MIND FIRST RESPONDERS TRAINING

The committee continues to discuss the differences in The Working Mind First Responder (WMFR) modules offered during the 8 hour session verses the 4 hour session. The overall consensus was although the 4 hour session was missing a key topic that delegates felt important, delegates believed the learnings were still very valuable for volunteer leaders. However, given the prevalence of suicide in the general community VFBV delegates have requested that CFA retain the 8 hour session as the preferred option, due to its coverage of this important topic.

The committee also discussed the impact COVID 19 was having on the ongoing delivery of WMFR training, as this training is not available by remote learning or electronically. CFA has explained the training package is owned by a Canadian company, who at this point in time, has not adapted an online version. Therefore, this has unfortunately resulted in this training being halted until further notice. Delegates have requested CFA approach the provider requesting an online course be developed as soon as possible.

# Joint Operations Committee

## 2 Minute Briefing



June 2020

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

### PLANNED BURNING TASKFORCE

VFBV is a strong advocate of planned burning and has been working with CFA to support and develop the CFA Planned Burn Taskforce project. This project has been funded under the Victorian Safer Together initiatives and draws on the feedback and advocacy put forward by VFBV through our 2013 study of volunteer attitudes towards planned burning.

The project is piloting the formation of a volunteer taskforce which would operate similar to a strike team to assist local brigades and districts when a major planned burn is requested, and local district resources are not available. In simple terms, members from across the state can nominate to volunteer to assist in a planned burn outside of their own district. Transport, accommodation and meals are made available for the duration of the burn.

The pilot was initiated in Districts 8, 13, 14 and 15 and is now being extended to other Districts. All applicants will be required to have Minimum skills competency, completed the Hazardous Tree Awareness Package and the burn-over drill and fill out an EOI form along with your Captains approval before being offered a position on the taskforce. Brigades have long recognised there are many training advantages of participating in planned burns such as allowing newer members to observe and learn fire behaviour and provide an opportunity for experienced fire fighters to pass on their knowledge and experience to others in a controlled relatively safe manner.

The committee has requested the project team improve circulation of information and expressions of interest wider than has occurred so far. The committee has also requested the project team consider attending DPC and Group meetings to explain the project and pilot. Consultation is progressing on some related matters to address minor VFBV concerns.

### POST SEASON REVIEWS AND AFTER ACTION REVIEWS

The Joint Operations Committee continues to advocate on the importance of timely and inclusive after-action reviews. Delegates continue to express concern at the drop in formal post-season after-action reviews and the lack of opportunity for a broader range of members to participate, with some Districts moving to a multi-agency invite only model. VFBV encourages any members who don't believe they have been provided an opportunity to attend or participate in an AAR, or Post Fire Danger Period review to raise these concerns via your VFBV District Council meetings so that we can identify areas where there is highest concern.

A positive outcome from ongoing discussions on the committee has been the development of the learning management centre. The LMC is an online portal for information and case studies about incidents. The aim of the stories is not to apportion blame, but to allow volunteers to share their experiences so we can all learn from them. The LMC aim to publish a new case study every month and have available AAR guidelines and templates to help members conduct a structured review or debrief process for analysing an incident to help improve performance. It considers what was planned, what happened, why it happened and what can be done to improve or learn from an incident. This valuable resource will help volunteers to facilitate improvements, support learning, identify trends and share lessons from across the State.

### SECONDMENT UNCERTAINTY

Volunteers have been expressing concerns with the high level of changeover and changes to Operations Managers (now ACFO's) and Operations Officers (Commanders). The frequency of changes at the local level has a significant impact on Brigades and Groups. Delegates have raised concerns that the planned changes for July 1<sup>st</sup> will cause significant upheaval in many districts. The introduction of FRV and as yet unknown makeup of the secondment model is driving concerns in many districts who are anxious they may receive less support than they currently have now, including the provision of career instructors. Delegates on the Joint Committee will continue to seek clarification around the secondment model and continue advocating the importance of ensuring that volunteers are adequately resourced and supported in the future.

# Joint Training Committee

## 2 Minute Briefing



June 2020

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

### DRIVING STRATEGY

VFBV delegates on the Joint Training Committee are happy to report that their ongoing advocacy for an endorsed Driver Training Strategy including licencing, driving under operational conditions and off-road is now progressing through CFA. Delegates recently met with CFA as part of the consultation process to discuss and workshop a strategy that will essentially result in a streamlined and consistent approach to new medium rigid licencing. The strategy will also include safer driving on-road and off-road and include a revised and more flexible delivery of CFA Driving Legislation and Policy aimed at Class 1 and 2 Brigades. The expectation is that the strategy will also be available on the Learning Management System (LMS) for all members to access. The Strategy also includes the provision for further educators to support delivery. It is expected this will lead to Districts having a more consistent approach and members having greater access to driver education.

### DIGITAL LEARNING

The restrictions on Brigade training due to the current COVID-19 pandemic has created extra pressure and challenges for brigade and group training officers. As one of the busiest and demanding roles within a brigade, training officers are finding creative new ways to keep in touch with training during the restrictions. The new digital online courses through the Learning Management System (LMS) aim to assist brigades with training that can be done from home or by remote learning. CFA has recently finalised and uploaded further digital learning courses onto the LMS system including, protect and preserve an incident scene, provide CPR (refresher), provide first aid (refresher) and updates in the asbestos awareness package to name just a few.

Members can access a range of digital learning opportunities on Brigades Online, including both operational and non-operational topics. CFA has advised that they are investigating the possibility of providing online training seminars and conducting theory training for postponed courses to help eliminate the effect of a 'training overload' once normal activities can resume.

### GENERAL FIREFIGHTER DELAYS

VFBV delegates to the Joint Training Committee were disappointed to learn that the much-anticipated release of the General Firefighter program has once again been delayed. General Firefighter is due to replace minimum skills wildfire. While some of these delays may be explained by COVID 19 restrictions, other delays have also been created by the departure and changing of key training personnel at HQ.

Delegates have requested consultation on materials as they become available to help minimise the delays and have requested a revised schedule.

During the early planning and implementation discussions, a concept of having General Firefighter champions in each of the 5 CFA regions was proposed. It is envisaged this will assist with implementing and mentoring trainers and assessors through the changes and is anticipated that the champions will receive briefings and training on how the program is designed to run, focusing on its ability to be flexible and adaptable to Brigade and Group needs.

Volunteer Trainer and Assessors are being invited to be part of this process and are encouraged to talk to District Training Coordinators if interested. CFA have provided a dedicated page on Brigades Online that has detailed information on the General Firefighter program: <https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/Show?pageId=gffCourse>

VFBV encourages all members to have a look at this page to familiarise themselves with the concept and view some of the completed works. It is expected that completed foundation skills drills packages including training videos will soon be made available on the Learning Management System (LMS).

# Joint Volunteerism Committee

2 Minute Briefing



June 2020

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

## ANNUAL BRIGADE REVIEW

District Councils and Brigades continue to raise concerns about the wide variances of Brigade Section 29 Inspections. Brigades have indicated that Section 29 inspections are quite often one way and that there should be more transparency in how CFA management can help address issues raised. A pilot of the new Annual Brigade Review (ABR) which is to replace the current section 29 process has been conducted with various Districts across the state and participating Brigades have provided feedback on questions, statements and outcomes stemming from the ABR.

CFA are currently evaluating the project with interviews of Commanders, BASO's and volunteer feedback from Brigades. Delegates to the Joint Volunteerism committee have requested to be more involved in this process and have requested further consultation. Delegates have indicated a number of items such as Brigade members being made aware of questions in advance, to allow time to correctly answer, answers should not be pre-populated, Brigade members be given adequate time to answer questions without prejudice and have opportunities for all Brigade members to participate in some of the planning work. Delegates will continue to monitor and watch closely as the ABR project develops further.

## CHAMPIONSHIPS

The State Championships for 2020 at Mooroopna were cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions. VFBV thanks the Host Committee and State Championships Committees for all the planning and preparation that was conducted prior to their cancellation.

Planning will continue for Mooroopna for 2021 and 2022 with regular updates on social media, CFA and VFBV web pages. VFBV and CFA will continue to work towards making this weekend a celebration of CFA. The weekend will not be just the Championships, but, also CFA displays with all directorates present, trade displays, kids entertainment, food truck festival, arts and craft market and a farmers market on the Sunday. A torchlight procession will be held Saturday night around Victoria Park Lake. The delegates will continue to track the progress towards 2021 and ideas for 2021 and beyond.

## NATIONAL EMERGENCY MEDALS

On Australia Day of this year, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced that the National Emergency Medal would be awarded to recognise emergency responders for service during the 2019–20 Australian bushfire season. The National Emergency Medal (NEM) was established in 2011 following the Victorian Black Saturday Fires and is awarded for sustained service during a nationally significant emergency.

VFBV delegates are working with CFA through the Joint Volunteerism Committee and are intending to review the nomination criteria, which is due to be announced later this year. As previously has been the case, the NEM is open to all emergency service volunteers, as well as fire, police, and paramedics. The Prime Minister has also announced that Australian Defence Force members may also be eligible.

The Committee is awaiting further advice from the Honours and Awards Secretariat in Canberra. In the meantime, work is underway to develop a process to support members with nominations, and review the processes used following the 2009 Fires NEM presentations and events.

The medal itself is only awarded once to an individual.

The regulations provide that if a person is awarded for additional service or nationally significant emergencies, it is done in the form of an additional clasp denoting the nationally significant emergency. For example, the Victorian Black Saturday fires were recognised by the clasp VIC FIRES 09.