



VFBV

VOLUNTEER FIRE  
BRIGADES VICTORIA

## **2 Minute Briefings December 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.

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

### DIGITAL RADIO UPGRADE

The Digital Radio Upgrade is continuing to roll out with Telstra approving an additional 4 new sites and the relocation of a further 2 sites across the network. With the addition of Ambulance Victoria coming onto the RMR network there is an opportunity to leverage off this work to improve the network based upon reported blackspots through the Observation Report process as forwarded through the Districts. The Committee encourages all members to continue lodging instances of blackspots via the observation report process to ensure these can be included into the AV works.

### STATE MOBILE RADIO (SMR) UPGRADE

The Joint Committee have been advised by CFA that the State Mobile Radio network is now switched off and the Motorola radios are being removed from vehicles where fitted. To ensure the ability for those radios in command and control roles are still able to access the telephone network or make radio to radio direct calls as part of conducting operational activities, a Tait Licence key is being installed. The Licence key is being installed in the Radios for ICC, LCF, DCC, FCV, FOV, MCV, Rescue, Rescue Support, Ground Observer, BA Vans, and vehicles allocated to Commanders and above.

Where there are two or more radios in a vehicle the licence will be installed nominally into the primary mobile radio. Any additional vehicles will require approval from the Assistant Chief Fire Officer Operational Communications after endorsement by the District ACFO. All radios operating on the RMR network can receive incoming direct calls without the requirement to be re-programmed. This system does not have the capability to call a radio from a telephone network or mobile phone system at this time.

### SUPPLEMENTARY ALERTING SYSTEM (SAS)

The Supplementary Alerting System was first released for Apple users on Monday 14th September 2020. The volunteer delegates on the EMV led SAS working party have been heavily involved in the testing of the application. Although the product has been released, there are still some work to be done with monthly updates scheduled until the end of the year. As more users of the SAS come on board and the number of messages increases there will be more opportunities to improve the system. If any member experiences issues or concerns with the SAS please contact the SAS Help desk on [sas.help@cfa.vci.gov.au](mailto:sas.help@cfa.vci.gov.au)

Delegates have also followed up and escalated some privacy and security concerns expressed by some members and have requested clarification or possible explanations or fixes. Delegates have also confirmed that no CFA medical data is shared through the platform, and the reference to medical data in the terms and conditions are intended for Ambulance Victoria users and also cover the caller supplied data in pager messages for Emergency Medical Response (EMR) calls.

The committee would like to remind all members that the primary method of alerting volunteers is still the EAS pager due to its higher reliability than the mobile network.

### ADVANCED MOBILE LOCATION (AML)

The Advanced Mobile Location is a new functionality available to the FireCom operators when they receive a call from a mobile phone into the triple zero system. The AML will enable more accurate location information being passed onto the operator and displayed onto the CAD system. With this information the ESTA call taker can more quickly and accurately pin-point a callers location and then the location of the fire or incident being reported. The Committee were advised the same system has been installed in New Zealand and working effectively for the last twelve months.

# Joint Community Safety Committee

2 Minute Briefing



December 2020

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

## EMERGENCY KIT – SUMMER PREPAREDNESS WITH COVID-19

VFBV delegates have discussed with CFA proposed additions to this year's public messaging to incorporate COVID-19 precautions. The most obvious change will be the recommendation for all public Bushfire Safety Plans to consider COVID-19 precautions and safety measures. Brigades delivering community education messaging should also familiarise themselves with the COVID-19 changes to the leaving early protocols. COVID-19 restrictions and pre-plans may also affect public venues people had planned to attend as an alternative safe place.

Public facing messaging will include suggesting that people add additional items to their home Emergency Kit. The changes suggest additional face masks, hand sanitiser – and antibacterial wipes (more than 60% alcohol.)

Service delivery of Community Safety programs, like all other CFA activities is affected – with all events and activities requiring a COVID safe plan to be prepared in advance. A template is available to assist Brigades and can be requested through your District Office or via Brigades online.

And as always, don't forget to have your own safety plan for your own families and household, so they know what to do in case of an emergency. This plan should include planning for your absence in case you are out fighting fires this fire season. A little bit of planning now will bring a most welcome piece of mind should the worst happen.

## FIRE PERMITS – APPLICATIONS NOW ONLINE

Members would recall VFBV's long advocacy to simplify and streamline the issuing of fire permits and the critical storage of this information in a centralised location for CFA, ESTA and other emergency services to access to deal with the increasing frequency of false alarms due to "smoke sightings" from legal burn-offs and planned burns.

The Committee welcomes the long awaited digital Fire Permit process, that allows members of the public to apply for their permits online at: <https://firepermits.vic.gov.au> The new Fire Permits System is a joint system developed under the Safer Together Program between DELWP, CFA and FRV for the application and management of fire permits to improve the process across all land tenures and jurisdictions. The new system has enabled agencies to move towards a single electronic source of information that provides consistency of requirements for permitted use of fire during a restricted period or on a Total Fire Ban (TFB) day.

The following permits can be applied for through the new system; Section 40 (CFA); Section 63 (DELWP); and Section 38 (CFA/FRV) which includes schedule 13 and 14 permits. Where municipalities are issuing permits, the digital system will refer applicants to that municipality. Individuals and businesses who applied for fire permits through their local council last year will still need to apply directly to them and not through this system. Municipal inclusion is planned for future enhancements of the system. The Committee will continue to monitor and provide updates as this work continues.

## PUBLICATION UPDATE

As reported in previous 2-Minute-Briefings, a high priority for the volunteer delegates of the Committee has been to strengthen the consultation and engagement process around CFA Community Safety publications. Brigades have long been raising the concern about the large number of publications that quickly age or present conflicting messaging, with the most serious complaint being the lack of consultation to provide front-line members who deal with their communities every day, the opportunity to have input into these critical publications. Sadly, this work has slipped behind in recent months due to COVID-19 related workloads within CFA. While delegates appreciate the reasons, VFBV has requested that publication review and consultation be a high priority for 2021 with a view to having 5 or 6 main booklets with critical and relevant information and the other booklets/pamphlets going digital.

# Joint Equipment and Infrastructure Committee

2 Minute Briefing



December 2020

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

## UNAUTHORISED MODIFICATIONS

The relationship between the District Mechanical Officers (DMO) and volunteers has always been strong, with volunteers valuing the effort and commitment they put into ensuring volunteer appliances are mechanically sound but also safe. This was very evident during the last summers fires where the DMO's worked tirelessly to ensure appliances were operational 24 hours a day. DMO's have reported however that there is an increasing number of unauthorised modifications being made to equipment and vehicles. Not only are some of the modifications not made according to manufacturer's specifications but they also make the job of maintaining the vehicle difficult and are unsafe for the DMO's to work around. Unauthorised additions to an appliance may increase the vehicle weight and therefore make it unsafe to drive in certain conditions. DMO's would like members to continue to be innovative but through the right channels. Any modification to an appliance or piece of equipment must first be approved by the District ACFO before it can be installed. Authorisation for vehicle modifications is usually a 3 way conversation between the ACFO, Captain and DMO representative. It is critical that equipment and appliances meet the safety requirements of the manufacturer to ensure everyone's safety.

## STRUCTURAL HELMET STORAGE

With the delays in the rollout of the new structural helmets in some districts due to COVID 19 restrictions it has allowed the Engineering team to investigate and design various options for the storage of the new structural helmets. Members would be aware the helmets are a different shape to the current structural helmet and therefore there are many challenges in storage options. Coupled with the many different appliance designs and sizes there is no 'one size fits all' approach. Members of the committee were presented with a report which showed that all of the new medium pumpers had been fitted with new helmet storage bags and work was continuing to progress on options for the light pumpers and other vehicles. Engineering reported that there may be no option on some appliances to store the helmets in the cabins, but alternative storage spots may need to be found in lockers.

## 4.4 IVECCO HEAVY TANKER DRIVER TRAINING UPDATE

Following VFBV's request for CFA to engage independent assessors to look at the transmission tanker issues and develop remedial options, CFA has advised it has not progressed this due to COVID restrictions. Alternatively, CFA reported it undertook a desktop assessment of the issues highlighted by brigades and determined that the heavy tanker in its view is generally accepted as a capable appliance in various situations including off road environments and operated as it was designed to do. The review also determined that additional training will be required to ensure drivers are comfortable with operating the appliance in all situations.

The review team determined that CFA Training needs to be engaged to increase the number of driver educators. It is expected that recent changes to driver trainer requirements will lead to an increase in interested volunteers to undertake and deliver this type of training. Brigades will be consulted to determine if they have sufficient numbers of drivers and training options could be extended to neighbouring brigades to ensure there are enough drivers available when the appliance goes away on extended campaigns.

## STORZ COUPLINGS

Following the story in the last 2 Minute Briefing on the inadequate funding for storz couplings changeover, delegates continue to pursue a plan to fully fund the changeover to storz couplings state-wide. CFA has recently confirmed that a funding application has now gone to government to restart the changeover program. We will continue to monitor and advise on its status as soon as the outcome is known.

# Joint HR, Welfare and OH&S Committee

2 Minute Briefing



December 2020

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

## WELLBEING SUPPORT DURING COVID-19

Wellbeing support for members continues to be prioritised through the Member Assist Program (MAP), Chaplaincy, Peer support and other services including the 'opt in' service, whereby volunteers receive regular support phone calls from those services. The committee was informed that uptake to the 'opt in' service has increased over recent months. Other services offered include proactive wellbeing checks for those with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 diagnoses, development of tip sheets, a new podcast and webinar series available via the intranet, interactive online drop-in sessions and pre-season psychological safety briefings for brigades. VFBV delegates have reported that there is a vast inconsistency in how these services are promoted across Districts and suggested that information needs to be streamlined and refreshed.

The Committee also reviewed the results from the recent CFA COVID-19 Pulse Survey which attracted 1883 responses. Results indicated that the majority of volunteers agreed they were receiving timely communication from CFA on COVID-19 related matters, and those communications were relevant and helpful, and they had confidence in CFA making decisions about returning to brigade duties. Understandably, one of the highest result areas for volunteers, was the desire for members to return to their brigades, to their training and to serving their communities as soon as possible.

## DIABETES ASSISTANCE

VFBV have, in recent months, been contacted by volunteers expressing concern and distress at being stood down or restricted in their duties, as the result of declaring their diabetes diagnosis to CFA. The committee discussed that as CFA do not currently have a Diabetes Mellitus Policy, CFA are guided by AFAC Guidelines (2002). AFAC guidelines suggest a case by case assessment with a final decision and medical clearance being made by a specialist treating doctor or medical panel. CFA and VFBV have disagreed on whether this protocol is practised currently, with the key difference being volunteers have reported their attending GP/Clinician/Endocrinologist's recommendations were not being considered and were ignored. VFBV's contention is that the CFA Doctor collaborates with the volunteer(s) specialist. It was agreed that it would be helpful for a representative from Health Services be invited to address the next meeting to discuss further.

## CFA DISCIPLINE PROCESS

CFA has presented a proposed Complaints Framework which includes a four-tier classification system to apply to new complaints. The system will allow low level L1 and L2 complaints, which consist mainly of minor interpersonal differences and less complex issues to be dealt with locally in the hope these matters will be resolved and closed off quickly. More complex and serious L3 and L4 complaints will be investigated by external consultants and the Integrity Unit.

There was discussion about how best to support volunteers during stand down/suspension by developing individual wellbeing plans for each volunteer and conducting weekly case progress reviews. VFBV Delegates have requested ALL complaints in ALL Districts be captured for status and progress reporting, and it was agreed that CFA would develop a weekly 'check in' with each District through the Regional HR Business Partners.

Delegates agreed that the proposed new measures were a vast improvement on the existing discipline process. VFBV also highlighted that while the new measures were welcome there is an urgent need to improve the investigative process immediately which in VFBV's view is often cruel, punitive and drawn out, leaving volunteers distressed and feeling unwelcomed at their brigade. Delegates have requested the guiding principles of consistency and fairness and everyone being treated with dignity and respect need to be implemented immediately to mitigate and minimise any further distress and possible harm to volunteers.

To assist us more closely to monitor the current and proposed systems and offer valuable volunteer input, all volunteers will be entitled to nominate a VFBV support person to attend any CFA volunteer discipline meetings / investigations.

# Joint Operations Committee

2 Minute Briefing



December 2020

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

## GROUND OBSERVERS

VFBV is pushing for CFA to commit to making critical Ground Observer training and endorsement available to volunteers. Delegates have continued to highlight the lack of training and opportunity for volunteers to be endorsed as a significant emerging issue for this fire season.

Strike team leaders and crew leaders would be well aware of the important role the Ground Observer plays in obtaining live incident intelligence. Their on the ground observations of the fire are communicated to the Incident Controller via the situation Unit/officer. Ground Observers traditionally provide IMT and ICC's with critical intelligence and observations of what is happening regarding weather, terrain, fire behaviour and resource allocation requirements.

Volunteers continue to report to VFBV that the Ground Observer role over time has been taken away from the volunteer ranks and barriers and lack of opportunity has frustrated and prevented volunteers from widely undertaking the ground observer role and training. CFA have acknowledged these concerns and have reported that they are currently engaging with Districts to gain an understanding on current ground observing capability. CFA have committed to VFBV that they are now assessing the current training package regarding its appropriateness and ability to deliver to the broader membership based on the capability required. While this process is being undertaken, VFBV would encourage anyone who has previously conducted Ground Observer training or operated in this space to please have a discussion with you District ACFO regarding your qualifications and possible availability to continue Ground Observing.

## STRENGTHENING ROLE OF GROUP

VFBV continues to advocate for the strengthening of the role of group as a priority as CFA transitions to a fully volunteer service delivery model. Delegates are advocating for an increase in focus on groups, better utilisation of their local knowledge, increased planning capability and command & control. VFBV has requested CFA seize the opportunity to thoroughly review procedures that will lead to an enhanced capability and simplification in some areas.

## 2020-21 SUMMER PREPAREDNESS

As we head rapidly into another fire season members are reminded of the steps they can take in regard to personal preparation to ensure they are fit, prepared and ready to tackle the challenges that are brought on by a fire season.

The Chief Officers expectations are well communicated with the 3 critical requirements being minimum skills, hazardous trees awareness and the annual entrapment drill. Skills maintenance training before the fire season hits is critical at ensuring you are ready for the difficulties that may occur.

This year in particular - all brigade OIC's, and crew leaders should always encourage members to practice the correct COVID-19 protocols, not just at the station but also at an incident. Good practices lead to ensuring they become second nature, the extra precautions that COVID-19 has brought have been well communicated and they don't change because of an incident. Training Officers can use the mandatory entrapment drill as an opportunity to modify behaviours. Crew leaders and Brigade OIC's will have extra duties this season to ensure their crews are operating in a COVID safe way. Crew Leaders are responsible for ensuring members understand and operate to the new COVID safe protocols and crews operate safely as well as your crew feeling fit and well. Extra precautions need to be taken regarding sanitizing at briefings, staging areas, fill points and during rest periods. Crew contact details must be up to date and vehicles and equipment regularly checked and cleaned.

The planning and communication during the next few months will continue and VFBV encourages all members to keep up to date by reading emails, posting bulletins and making members fully aware of the expectations for this summer's operational response. Most importantly - look after yourselves and your fellow brigade members and Stay Safe.

# Joint Training Committee

2 Minute Briefing



December 2020

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

## HAZARDOUS TREE ASSESSING

VFBV continues to pursue appropriate training and endorsement processes for CFA members to assess dangerous trees. This has remained a priority item for a number of years now with volunteers from across the state continuing to raise this issue with VFBV. Volunteers continue to highlight the importance of developing this capability within CFA.

VFBV delegates are also advocating for a recognition of prior learning (RPL) process to ensure suitably qualified and experienced volunteers who already have appropriate skills from their employment backgrounds (like arborists etc) are recognised. CFA has acknowledged the concerns and has recently agreed to investigate training options. Discussions indicate CFA's preference is to approach the same provider that DELWP and FFMVic are currently using for their own training delivery to provide consistency and ensure highly qualified and experienced tree assessors are involved in training delivery and assessment. Delegates have indicated they would support this approach, pending further information and consultation.

## VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP

VFBV has welcomed news that \$9 million dollars from last season's bushfire public donations money has been allocated towards developing CFA volunteer leadership programs. Delegates to the Joint Training Committee have been long advocating for leadership programs to fill the gap left by CFA's decision to discontinue the trusted and popular MCS Fireline Leadership program. And while VFBV continues to call for the resumption of this program, we will work in good faith to ensure fair and appropriate competitive and merit-based selection processes are applied for future programs. VFBV has requested a robust consultation and engagement process be established to ensure the new programs deliver tangible and long-lasting benefits to grass root members and ensure mistakes of the past are not repeated. We will keep members apprised of progress and encourage members to look out for opportunities to contribute to this project's scoping works.

## GENERAL THERMAL IMAGING CAMERA (TIC) TRAINING

Members would recall previous comms around VFBV's push for CFA to adapt its TIC Training for a short and simple package aimed at using TIC's within the bushfire environment. CFA has recently presented to the Committee draft materials, of which delegates have provided detailed comment and feedback. While generally happy the materials are better meeting the intent and scope volunteers had asked for, delegates have provided more robust feedback regarding the format, structure and delivery methods planned for the course. Delegates were particularly pleased to see the draft package easily able to accommodate either of the two TIC models used by brigades across the state, with the materials easily adapting to concepts relevant to the Drager UCF9000 and the newly released intermediate 3M Scott. Delegates are now waiting for further consultation on the final draft after the initial feedback has been reviewed and considered by CFA.

## COVID-19 IMPACTS ON TRAINING DELIVERY

VFBV delegates have continued to express concerns regarding the impact to training caused directly by the COVID-19 pandemic and CFA restrictions that have been in place for much of this year that has prevented brigades from conducting face-to-face training and practical assessments. Delegates have cited examples raised by senior volunteers that illustrate a large backlog of courses which can only be partially completed electronically, and still require practical components to be completed. With the high uptake of e-learning courses during the pandemic, it is feared this backlog will have a significant impact on new skills acquisition training well into next year. CFA Training has accepted these concerns and has agreed to monitor and provide regular updates to the committee on prioritisation of training delivery state-wide and how the backlog is being managed. Delegates will also continue to advocate for greater participation and encouragement of volunteer trainer and assessors so that brigade viability and operational capability is top of mind.

# Joint Volunteerism Committee

2 Minute Briefing



December 2020

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

## COVID-SAFE STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS

CFA and VFBV continue to monitor the Department of Health advice concerning current COVID restrictions and advice. Plans and works are in place to ensure the safe conduct for all competitors, officials, guests and visitors. The CFA Pandemic Management team together with Host Committees and State Rural and Urban Committees are working together to develop appropriate COVID-Safe plans, incorporating all Victorian State Health guidelines in relation to major events to ensure a consistent approach. The events to be held depends on restrictions that would be in place and would include such things as social distancing, hygiene and the wearing of masks and contact tracing. Planning is underway for a scaled back event, which may or may not include the public access, the torchlight event, and on-site entertainment such as the open air cinema etc. A Welcome Pack (COVID-19 Safe event) for all attending the State Championships is currently being developed and is hoped to be finalised by the end of the year ready for distribution closer to the event.

## EMERGENCY SERVICES MEMORIAL

The Emergency Services Memorial in Treasury Gardens is now complete and open to the public, however, this year's CFA memorial service could not be conducted due to COVID restrictions in place. To answer some questions received from volunteers, prior to decommissioning the Fiskville memorial, family members and Brigades have received framed photographs of the original plaques and memorial wall. VFBV and CFA have been working together to assist with the delivery of these frames to affected families and brigades. The actual plaques located at Fiskville have been carefully removed and respectfully placed in an underground vault that is buried in the heart of the new memorial site, to symbolise the link between the old memorial and the new.

## RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PROJECTS

Delegates to the Joint Committee have been working cooperatively with CFA on a number of exciting recruitment and retention projects in collaboration with the volunteer support team. These projects are aimed to promote, encourage, retain and re-engage volunteer members to ensure the future sustainability of CFA.

One project that has been completed is the "**Information for Families Guide**". This Guide is designed to support family members and/or caregivers of new members by giving them tailored information about what experiences and impacts volunteering with CFA may have on them and their families. Ensuring families are informed about what it means to be a part of CFA contributes to the health, safety, wellbeing, inclusion and ultimately retention of CFA members. The **Information for Families Guide** can be accessed on CFA Online for current members and their families. New members will receive a resource booklet, with access details, to pass on to their family members in their Welcome to CFA pack.

Other projects in progress are the **Expression of Interest** portal. This EOI process is initially started when a member of the public registers on the CFA public web page wanting to join as a volunteer. Delegates have previously raised a number of concerns relating to the long delay from when a person first actually registers, and when they are eventually referred to the local brigade. A system is being developed to improve this process and facilitate the timely notification to a brigade that someone in their area is wanting to join. The project is still in the early stages and delegates are keen to receive any brigade feedback on what other improvements you would like to see.

The **Brigade Management App** is another project being scoped to improve the recording of member activities and time spent on CFA related activities. This is useful information for areas such as nominations for awards, applying for grants and general promotion to the public of how much commitment is made by volunteers to their communities.

These projects are being developed through strong collaboration between the volunteer delegates and CFA through the joint committee process, and the committee is looking forward to progressing these projects and will keep members informed on progress.