



VFBV

VOLUNTEER FIRE
BRIGADES VICTORIA

2 Minute Briefings September 2022

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



September 2022

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

MICROSOFT OFFICE 365 WORK GROUP

The VFBV Joint Communications and Technology Committee members were heartened to hear that a new work group is being established to review and transition volunteer access to Microsoft 365, formerly known as Office 365.

Members may recall that sometime ago, VFBV raised concerns with CFA that Office 365 licensing had been downgraded and in some cases withdrawn from volunteers accessing Members On Line. Previously all members were provided with an Office 365 account donated by Microsoft automatically, but changes to Microsoft's pricing structure resulted in the need to allocate licenses to only those that need it, rather than indiscriminately applying to all accounts.

Members who already have a @members.cfa.vic.gov.au email address setup and in use, are likely already allocated a Office 365 license. But for newer members, or those who are yet to activate their @members.cfa email address, you can now request access via the "Manage My Profile" link located in the top right corner when you log in to Members On Line. These licenses provide access for CFA volunteers to Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, One Note, OneDrive and Teams, when signing in using your @members.cfa email address.

SUPPLEMENTARY ALERTING SERVICE

The Committee was concerned to read the latest stats supplied by EMV reporting the number of member devices still running old versions of the SAS application. Reports indicate that approximately only 24% have updated to the latest version (7.07) of the app. There have been several updates where fixes have been implemented based on member feedback to ensure the application works with the least number of errors as possible. The reports indicate some users are still running versions as old as 2.01. The working group are encouraging members to please ensure they have upgraded to the latest version of SAS on all devices, including web browsers.

GPS MAPPING

Following a request by VFBV State Council, delegates have commenced discussions with CFA on the potential to better utilise the built in GPS systems built into many modern appliances, including new tankers. Investigations reveal that the manufacturers built in navigation system has been turned off by the manufacturer. Discussions are to take place with Fleet to determine whether the inbuilt GPS relates to truck dimensions or passenger vehicles, and will assess the benefits and risks of the various systems. Discussions also centred on whether brigades can access the corporate Licence for CFA recognised mapping software packages. The Committee was advised that CFA are looking at two packages – FireMapper and Avenza with the CFA to present to the next Committee meeting regarding advantages and disadvantages between the two applications.

Related to the use of tablets in vehicles, concerns were highlighted where the inappropriate installation of devices in CFA vehicles without approval are in some instances, against the Australian Design Rules and therefore unsafe. The Committee were informed by CFA the Mobility Solutions Project will be addressing the installation of mounting brackets and associated hardware such as tablets, cameras, and dash cams through Operations Bulletins. Brigades are encouraged to ensure any fitment and installation of devices is approved by your local DMO workshop.

MISSING PAGER MESSAGES

Committee members have raised concerns of the large numbers of reports of pagers not receiving messages recently. CFA advised there are potentially a number of pagers that are outside of their warranty period and have committed to replacing these non-warranty pagers when issues are identified. ICT are also aware of the instances where several members within one brigade are missing messages as well. This would confirm the pagers involved are of the same age and out of warranty. Members are requested to submit Observation Reports outlining the messages being missed.

Joint Community Safety Committee

2 Minute Briefing



September 2022

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

SMOKE ALARM INSTALLATION PROJECT

CFA continues to work with agencies to identify people who are at a higher risk to house fires due to not having working smoke alarms installed in their homes. This can be categorised into two groups of, 'those who can but don't' and 'those who cannot'. Reported barriers to people installing smoke alarms in the house include vulnerable people like those living with a disability, financial disadvantage, use of prescription medicine, alcohol or other drugs and cultural and linguistic barriers.

The project aims to provide enhanced resources for people to better understand the importance of working smoke alarms. Resources will be made available in several languages, to better empower people 'who can but don't' install, or have working alarms in their homes.

To assist those who 'cannot' install and maintain smoke alarms in their home, CFA is developing a home visitation service that Community Engagement officers in brigades will be able to provide for their communities. This program will provide 3000 free smoke alarms which will be distributed across districts in areas that are of greatest risk. These alarms will have a lithium (10 year) battery. Brigades will be able to install up to six alarms per home visit in recommended areas of the house. Alarms will be installed through easy to use Velcro pads alleviating the need to drill holes. Interested brigades should contact their Community Engagement Coordinator at their District office for further information.

ENGAGING WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Safer together program encourages communities to reduce the risk of bushfire in the community by delivering three key themes, Community First, Working Together and the use of Science and Technology.

The committee was provided with an update on CFA's engagement with local governments. Much of this work is being done through the Safer Together program with the assistance of brigades, providing grants to local governments to partner with fire agencies to reduce bushfire risk and also funding to manage and reduce fuel loads on private land and roadways. CFA is currently funding 10 Local Government Areas with grants up to \$150,000 per year. For more information about the program, visit the external website www.safertogether.vic.gov.au.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR AFDRS IMPLEMENTATION

As previously reported, the Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS) is a project of national significance that has been developed through collaboration between state, territory, and federal governments. The implementation of AFDRS in Victoria is being overseen by Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) in partnership with relevant fire agencies. Its aim is to reduce the impacts of bushfire by providing an improved method for communicating fire danger to the public which has nationally consistent, clear and concise messaging, including the use of action statements.

To assist in community members understanding the changes and what it means for them, work is being undertaken to update resources that are provided by brigades to their communities. Eight publications have been updated with a further 7 in the process of being updated. These publications will be made available to brigades as part of the implementation. Corflute signage has been updated with AFDRS information and has been ordered to assist promote and explain AFDRS.

As well as material resources, a media campaign has been developed and website resources are in progress. Members have access to E-learning modules and videos that have recently been added to CFA's Learning management System to help brigades understand the changes and communicate these changes to their communities. The Australian Fire Danger Rating System commenced on 1 September 2022

Joint Equipment and Infrastructure Committee

2 Minute Briefing



September 2022

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

FCV NAMING

Members of the District 20 VFBV District Council highlighted to State Council a very common issue regarding vehicle identification. There is currently no standard or SOP to have brigade or group identification placed on the rear of FCV's as there is for tankers. When strike teams are allocated a FCV to follow for further tasking there have been issues highlighted at a number of local levels by brigades that during busy campaigns involving multiple strike teams – the lack of identification has led to confusion if the lead tanker is following the right vehicle or not. This was raised and put forward at the June committee meeting by VFBV representatives seeking a possible resolution. Through evidential discussion and good working rapport within the committee, it was agreed that it would be possible to include brigade name on rear of FCV's for all new standard builds. CFA fleet services and the engineering department have provided a draft design specification sheet with the standard font and size so brigades can retrofit their own vehicles with brigade names. Members have also requested for CFA to investigate funding to retrofit existing FCV's with brigade names for brigades or groups that cannot afford to supply their own. Options are currently being investigated.

BRIGADE TOILETS

Brigades have again raised the issue of CFA stations without toilet and washing up facilities for members. In 2013 the committee asked CFA to develop a 5-year strategy to address the stations without toilets. However, through the VESEP funding stream many of these stations received portable toilets or new toilets as minor works or upgrades to stations. There were some areas where it was determined through work done by Land and Building Services that it was not physically possible to have a toilet due to land size, location, environmental issues or the close location of neighbouring facilities. It was understood that on the whole - this work had been completed. However recent feedback from members indicates this may not be the case, and given the annual section 29 process, delegates are disappointed that CFA appears to have little oversight of exactly how many stations are yet to have adequate facilities.

VFBV Delegates have requested CFA undertake an audit to determine the extent of the problem and develop a plan to finalise the provision of toilets to every station possible. Delegates will continue to monitor the progress to ensure members are adequately resourced for toilets and personal hygiene facilities.

WORKING PARTY UPDATE

Delegates have been busy over the past few months with representatives sitting on several key working parties.

The **light tanker** working party recently met at Broadford to test the 4WD capabilities of the new Concept Light Tanker. Although the conditions were quite wet and the track slippery the vehicle performed well under the conditions and work will continue to test its ability and performance.

The members of the **helmet stowage** working party have continued to investigate the possibility of members being able to wear helmets in trucks. Currently driving SOP's prohibit members from wearing their helmets inside the cabin due to ergonomic and possible neck and head injuries in the event of a rough ride or collision. The working party are looking at other emergency organisations within Australia and overseas to determine if there needs to be a change in policy. Early investigations indicate it will be unlikely that our current directive will change, however the final outcome is still to be determined. The second aspect to the project is investigating other options for the stowage of helmets in CFA appliances.

The **next generation CFA Pumper** working party have met recently to finalise a Terms of Reference and Role Statement so that this program can continue to investigate the refurbishment of some of the current NSW backed pumpers and look to the future design and configuration of the future CFA pumpers.

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

CHILD SAFETY ONLINE MODULE

Delegates addressed some concerns regarding the **Playing your Part** Child Safety module access on Brigades Online. Currently a member only has three opportunities to complete the assessment module. If a member wishes to clarify something or alter their responses, after three attempts they are unable to gain access. Given the importance of the subject matter, VFBV requested that this issue be remedied, thereby allowing a member to access the module as many times as desired. CFA are currently developing a further three (3) Child Safety modules and it is anticipated those modules will also afford volunteers' unlimited access.

VFBV SUPPORT AVAILABLE TO VOLUNTEERS INVOLVED IN COMPLAINTS PROCESS

VFBV delegates have requested that volunteers involved in the CFA Complaint Process, either as a complainant, a respondent, a witness or indeed, any brigade member, be made aware of the support available to them, from VFBV. Previously, delegates were assured that all correspondence emanating from CFA to volunteers, would include VFBV support information. Unfortunately, while this has been true for HQ correspondence, some correspondence generated from District Offices does not make mention of this support. CFA assured the committee that going forward this information would be included in all CFA correspondence.

Any volunteer who finds themselves involved in the CFA Complaints process, in any capacity, can call on VFBV for advice and support. VFBV are available to support members by attending alongside volunteers during their interviews with CFA personnel or investigators, either as respondents, complainants, or witnesses. VFBV are also able to correspond on behalf of volunteers to CFA, investigators, consultants, and other outside agencies and to provide information and resources, but also provide moral support. It is important for volunteers to know they do not need to navigate this process alone. If you require assistance please contact your VFBV State Councillors, Support officer or the VFBV Office on 03 9886 1141.

BRIGADE 'CULTURAL' REVIEWS

Delegates have raised the matter of "Cultural Reviews", currently and historically, conducted at brigades across the state by external consultant(s) engaged by CFA. VFBV support, in essence, the use of a review to understand issues that may be impacting a brigade and thereby, dealing with local issues at a local level, thus potentially avoiding escalating the matter to a complaint. Whilst supporting the idea, VFBV has voiced real concern around the fact that no clear protocols exist for a) the content of the review b) how the review is conducted and c) how the outcome of that review is utilised. Delegates also shared examples where some reviews have been perceived as punitive in nature and only entrenched issues rather than fix them.

As part of a brigade review, delegates expressed the need for confidentiality, impartiality, and an 'opt in' or 'opt out' approach, rather than volunteers feeling forced to participate, which has been the experience for some volunteers in the past. Also, all brigade members should be treated fairly, without bias and with respect. CFA agreed the title "cultural" was inappropriate and agreed to refer to them as a 'Brigade Review', in the future.

CFA has also agreed to provide clear protocols in the future and all reviews will be approved or not approved by CFA Complaints Management, with all reviews to be monitored by CFA Complaints Management at HQ. VFBV have been provided a list of "Approved Providers" of consultants currently engaged in mediation and investigation work for CFA. These providers require the requisite licences, registrations, accreditations, qualifications and insurance. VFBV is aware of the services currently provided by the approved companies and feedback from volunteers suggest these companies have delivered a high level of professionalism but equally as important, have treated volunteers with respect and care. VFBV will work with CFA to ensure annual follow ups are conducted to maintain this high standard. Following sensitive discussions, there are a number of consultants who have previously been engaged by CFA who will not be engaged by CFA in the future, as they do not satisfy these required standards.

Joint Operations Committee

2 Minute Briefing



September 2022

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

PUMPING PITS

In February 2015 members were informed via Safety Alert 35 that the use of Pumping Pits was suspended. The issues related to the possible contamination of pumping pits due to water quality issues and the possible presence of dangerous e. coli. During this time, a number of brigades have sought VFBV assistance to try and have this issue resolved, but CFA response has historically been fragmented and at times contradictory. Following a renewed push, a project team from the environmental compliance team are now investigating options for brigades to maintain the necessary pits in a safe manner. Two options are being investigated; to reinstate the use of pumping pits with a water quality testing regime to ensure firefighter safety; or moving to replace them with a 2000lt collar tank. The collar tank option has pros and cons, with several advantages being it allows the draughting training to take place at any location not just at the station where the pit is located, mitigates the possible use of contaminated stagnant water that lies in the bottom of the pumping pits and provides brigades with an operational response advantage. The project is also reviewing disadvantages such as the manual handling issues and runoff issues. VFBV delegates have suggested a trial program of the collar tanks be run in several areas before a final decision is made on whether to permanently close more than 100 pumping pits located across the state or reinstate them with a regular testing regime to ensure they are safe to use.

DASHCAMS

The issue of brigades needing direction on the use of dashcams has come to the fore again, with many brigades having ordered dashcams through the CFA and Brigades Donations Trust Picklist but unable to install them without direction of a CFA policy. CFA has distributed a draft Surveillance Device procedure that covers dashcams and other associated devices such as data storage, security cameras and the installation of tablets in vehicles. Members are encouraged to review the draft and provide feedback to help inform VFBV feedback to the policy.

FIRE MEDICAL RESPONSE

Brigades have been talking to VFBV for some time seeking to be more involved in medical response to their communities. Therefore, the committee has welcomed the recent announcement that a Fire Medical Response (FMR) program is to be expanded across 50 locations across the State. The program is not intended to be a replacement for EMR but rather as an additional service for brigades who wish to participate. The initial rollout will be offered to 50 brigades across the state and will be optional to those who wish to participate. There will be extra specific training involved and a skills maintenance regimen to ensure members are appropriately trained. In early discussions VFBV have requested that CFA work with us to develop a comprehensive informed decision-making model that clearly outlines the additional commitments of taking on FMR, as well as the likely impacts both positive and negative. And while all brigades no doubt want to support their communities in times of need, CFA's statutory obligations of ensuring brigades are available for fire response must remain a priority. This may mean some locations may not be suitable for additional services until other capabilities are further enhanced. The model will be an opt-in one to ensure brigades are supportive and willing to take on the additional responsibilities, and potential brigades will be identified in consultation with Ambulance Victoria.

FIRE INCIDENT REPORTING SYSTEM (FIRS) ONLINE

Many brigades have been enthusiastically using the new Fire Incident Reporting System (FIRS) online. The purpose of the online system is to allow brigades to log their fire reports via an online portal through their mobile phone, tablet or PC. The intent is that brigades who have the technology can even log their response from the incident and not have to wait until they return to station and fill out paperwork. The FIRS working group have been finetuning the system to ensure a smooth operation across the State. The online system is completely optional, and the current paper based and phone in options will continue to be offered for brigades who are not yet able to confidently use the online option due to technology or connectivity issues or prefer using the manual and phone-in options.

Joint Training Committee

2 Minute Briefing



September 2022

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

PUA19 TRANSITION PROGRESS

VFBV delegates on the Joint Training Committee have continued to provide significant subject matter expertise as CFA finalise its PUA19 transition of training materials. A total of 58 packages were required to be reviewed and updated as part of this process, as well as the development of RPL pathways for 16 units. In recent months, workshops have been conducted with volunteer subject matter experts, instructors and CFA's doctrine team to cover units that have undergone significant review and change including: driving, structural firefighting, bushfire firefighting, specialist response, organisational development, leadership and community safety.

The Joint Training Committee (JTC) held an out of session extraordinary meeting in mid-August to progress a new governance process that ensures the JTC is consulted on any new or reviewed training material. This meeting follows the new consultation process that was introduced recently with Managers Learning and Development, Instructors, SME's and VFBV representatives to gather feedback on the PUA19 course materials. While the review workshops were held during business hours many members took the time to assist in the workshops and we are grateful for their time and commitment. VFBV has requested future consultations planned should also cater for different timeframes that will make it easier for volunteers to attend, including evenings and weekends.

AFAC PEER REVIEW

The Committee continues to monitor CFA progress towards addressing the 14 AFAC Training peer review recommendations. Working groups have been established to scope treatments and workplans that seek to address the recommendations before proceeding to a Project Control Board, and then to the CFA executive for consideration.

CFA reports that some of the work included in the recommendations are long term pieces of work, whereas others can be completed quicker in order to get the outcomes delivered.

VFBV delegates to the JTC have discussed recommendation #2 from the report (dealing with BOSP) and raised concerns relating to the quality of data presented in the current BOSP report. VFBV is seeking a greater emphasis on using the BOSP report to drive training needs analysis and to assist with training demand forecasting, emphasising that BOSP targets are a minimum and not to be used as an artificial ceiling that should limit the availability of training to brigades. VFBV have also requested that the HQ team advocate for greater consistency in how BOSP is used by operational colleagues across the state to ensure the benefits of this tool is better realised.

FIRST AID TRAINING

Back in June CFA informed the committee that First Aid training was to be paused for a short period while the successful new First Aid contractor was inducted and had time to ensure it was familiar with CFA's systems. Members will be pleased to note that following the appointment of CFA's new preferred First Aid provider, the pause in first aid training has now been lifted. Alenns Training in conjunction with Australian Pacific Solutions (APTS) will now coordinate CFA's first aid training and assessment. And while it will take a little while for the system to be fully operational, 332 courses have already been scheduled across the state for September and October through the online booking system. It is hoped that LMS will soon reflect the changes and allow members to choose a training session and time that best suits them. Courses are all being offered as fully face-to-face or a new hybrid version that includes some online pre-course work, and a shorter face-to-face component to follow. In monitoring course attendances, it has been noted that many courses had to be cancelled earlier this year due to members not attending booked sessions. This not only results in wasted money but taking up spaces on courses that could have been given to someone else. If you are booked to undertake First Aid training or in fact any training courses, could you please make an effort to attend or provide sufficient notice to the provider of your change of circumstances so your place can be substituted to another member.

Joint Volunteerism Committee

2 Minute Briefing



September 2022

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

CFA MEMBER POCKETBOOK

The Committee continues to consider options for information to be more readily available for all members at all levels of brigades. Recently there have been significant changes to the members online portal and early discussions with delegates to the Volunteerism committee have been about providing information in many formats. While members agree that the concept of moving information online has a lot of merit and can assist with keeping it current, there continues to be a need and desire by members for alternatives and more traditional formats. Delegates have also emphasised that until the completion of the brigade connectivity program, there will continue to be many brigades that do not currently have adequate internet capability to access all the online materials. A new CFA Handy Reference guide or Pocketbook is currently in its infancy and delegates have been asked to provide ideas and thoughts on what could be included in the booklet. The 'pocketbook' is not meant to replace the Brigade Management Manual but may link back to the BMM if needed. Members have requested a working party be established to look further at this project and develop a shortlist of content. If you have any ideas, please talk to your District Council or Joint Committee representative.

VOLUNTEER NUMBERS

The Committee continues to monitor overall volunteer numbers, with the latest figures recording 52,522 volunteers. Delegates continue to raise concerns about the decreasing number of CFA volunteers and the lack of a government funded recruitment and retention program to address the issue. Trends have recorded sharp declines over the last 6 years, coinciding with fire services reform and related controversies. A more recent sharp decline has followed COVID-19 related impacts including mandatory vaccination and lockdowns/restrictions that has significantly impacted on brigades. Of particular concern has been recent declines in Junior members, which may also be the result of COVID-19 restrictions that have limited many of the activities that normally attract and retain younger members to the service.

While there are some positive trends showing an increase in female members in leadership roles including captains and other BMT roles for example, it is clear that targeted recruitment is required to help build this momentum. Delegates have requested a workshop be held to understand the trends in more detail and have asked for some more analysis of the data to be undertaken to better understand what can be done to stabilise and reverse the downward trend.

With the VFBV Welfare and Efficiency survey celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, the trends in volunteers' opinions on how CFA members believe the organisation is tracking on a range of issues relating to their brigade, District, Region and CFA Headquarters continues to be informative. This year the survey shows that there has been some improvement in cooperation, respect and professionalism and support from CFA. The survey results indicate that some of the changes that CFA has implemented has helped to improve volunteer satisfaction - but there is still some way to go.

CHAMPIONSHIPS

The dates for next year's CFA/VFBV State Firefighter Championships have now been confirmed. The 2023 State Championships will again be held over 2 weekends in Mooroopna in District 22, with the Urban Junior Events on March 18th and 19th and the Urban Senior, Rural Senior and Junior Events on March 25th and 26th. The championships attract a broad range of members and act as the largest annual 'celebration of CFA' and include community events, displays, skills maintenance opportunities and a large CFA corporate attendance. Competing in championship is now more flexible than ever. VFBV is encouraging brigades to enter for the event with particular focus on encouraging brigades who have not competed for some years to put together a team, combine a group of brigades for a team or enter into just specific events if they don't want to compete across the whole program. The Urban Competition and Rules Committee are planning to hold a judges and officials workshop in early November to assist potential new and current judges/officials with handy tips and direction to improve decision making and outcomes for the events. If you have an interest in officiating at the championships please keep an eye out for more details as they become available and talk to your local competition committee.