VFBV | VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

2 Minute Briefings March 2026

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 Community Safety Committee

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PLAN AND PREPARE REDEVELOPMENT PROGRESS

Previously we provided details on the initial work being undertaken to redevelop the Plan and Prepare section of the CFA website. This work continues and is being guided by a deliberate and evidence-based planning process, designed to ensure the site meets the needs of contemporary users while supporting CFA's community safety objectives.

Changes are being informed by research undertaken in 2022, including surveys, one-to-one interviews and focus groups with community members and CFA volunteers. Website analytics and a formal user experience audit supported findings of users reporting difficulty finding information, particularly on mobile devices, and described the existing site as "cluttered, dense and clunky".

Key objectives of the project include improving mobile responsiveness, simplifying navigation, enhancing search functionality, and presenting information in a more intuitive and actionable way. Significant preparatory work has been undertaken to develop new page templates and functionality, including quick links based on popular searches, page summaries and key takeaways, 'jump to' headings, improved resource filtering, downloadable checklists, and enhanced use of imagery.

Content frameworks have also been developed as part of project preparation. These are designed to ensure information is consistent, accessible and on brand, regardless of who authors or updates content, and will support ongoing maintenance of the site post-launch.

Background work and testing has occurred to ensure the new website is user-friendly. Some updated content has already been published on the existing website to support current campaigns and community safety initiatives.

The Joint Community Safety Committee participated in a workshop to develop a strategy for communication and change management planning. Discussions focused on how volunteers should be engaged about the changes and how they can be supported to promote the redeveloped website within their local communities.

The redeveloped Plan and Prepare website is scheduled to go live between July and September 2026, with additional content enhancements planned following launch.

FIRE EQUIPMENT MAINTENANCE (FEM) TOOL

Following long advocacy, FEM is moving to an online system after relying on a paper-based system that involved printing over 139,000 sheets of paper per year on an old dot matrix printer that used continuous pin-feed perforated paper.

The Joint Committee and FEM advisory committee have ensured brigades involved in FEM have been consulted on what they would like the FEM process to look like and have been involved in updating the FEM Brigade Manual.

A review of FEM contracts has been completed, and a procurement process resulted in 16 suppliers being shortlisted to support FEM brigades. Brigades were asked to provide feedback on the shortlist, with 159 brigades supporting one of the nominated contractors available.

Implementation of the FEM solution through ServiceNow commenced on 1 December, with some early teething problems being sorted out. The rollout will occur in five stages, beginning with 68 brigades supported by eight to ten contractors. Full statewide rollout is planned by 30 June 2026, supported by an ongoing audit process to identify and address any issues arising.

Joint Equipment and Infrastructure Committee

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FLEET UPDATE

VFBV continues to advocate strongly on the ageing CFA fleet, and the unsustainable level of funding that is preventing a proper replacement and renewal program. CFA has reported to delegates that it has lodged a further submission with the State Government seeking additional funding for appliances and that this currently under active consideration.

The Committee discussed the potential implications of this submission on the forward appliance replacement program, including any impacts on delivery timelines, prioritisation, and resource allocation. In this context, CFA reaffirmed its strong and ongoing commitment to the progressive removal of single-cab and two-wheel drive vehicles where required. This commitment is supported through the established annual prioritisation process, which ensures replacement decisions are informed by operational need, risk, and strategic objectives.

In response, and noting brigades usually replaced their brigade funded appliances more promptly than CFA, delegates queried whether securing the first right of purchase of VESEP funded brigade-owned vehicles being retired was practicable. It was noted that CFA supports this and that it is under consideration. The Committee discussed how this approach may provide operational and financial benefits to the fleet, particularly through the effective short-term cascading of vehicles to suitable locations, thereby maximising asset utilisation, extending service life where appropriate, and delivering improved safety and value for money.

GENDER DIVERSITY CAPITAL WORKS PROGRAM

The Committee was advised that CFA has submitted a proposal seeking approval for a further round of works under the existing Gender Diversity Program. It was noted that all new stations, as well as any stations undergoing significant upgrades or modifications, must incorporate the principles and infrastructure outcomes of the Gender Diversity Program into their design and delivery.

This program is a key initiative aimed at delivering meaningful, gender-based transformational change across CFA. Its primary objective is to ensure that CFA facilities are welcoming, safe and supportive for all members, employees and visitors by addressing historical barriers within station infrastructure that may limit participation by people of different genders and abilities. This is achieved by providing modernised amenity facilities that appropriately cater to the diverse needs of all users. This includes delivering design solutions that consider gender diversity, disability access, privacy, safety, and dignity to recognise that fit-for-purpose amenities are critical to supporting participation, retention and wellbeing across the organisation.

The current and future phases of the program involve amenity upgrades at 41 CFA stations and three training campuses. Works are primarily focused on improving toilet, shower, and turnout facilities within stations, ensuring these spaces are inclusive, accessible, and functional. At training campuses, the program includes constructing dedicated change buildings to provide appropriate facilities for training participants. Collectively, these upgrades represent a significant investment in creating equitable and inclusive CFA environments across the state.

VESEP PREPARATIONS

With the dust having only just settled on the 2025 VESEP allocations, brigades are reminded that it won't be long before the next round opens. If your brigade is considering applying for a grant you are encouraged to get the process going now and not leave it until the last minute. Unsuccessful applications from the last round are encouraged to talk to the DPC and district officers to see what can be altered to get ready for this year's allocation. Contact with land and building services for any station alterations is a must as well as engaging with your group and DPC to see what improvements can be made for any vehicle grants.

Joint Member Services Committee

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CONTEMPORARY VOLUNTEER MEMBERSHIP MODEL (CVMM)

The CVMM options paper has been released by CFA and is open for member comments and feedback with the aim of enhancing the organisations ability to attract, support and retain volunteers over the long term. The project acknowledges VFBV's commitment and involvement is essential for the strategic direction of the project, and seeks broad engagement with both delegates and members. Members are encouraged to access the CVMM Options Paper, through the Members Online portal and provide comment on the 13 recommendations or are encouraged to complete the survey. Members can also register your interest for future engagement activities or becoming a Champion by contacting cvmm@cfa.vic.gov.au

EMERGENCY SERVICES TAX REBATE

Delegates were provided with an update from CFA on the organisations involvement in assisting members to claim their Emergency Services Tax rebate. The rebate scheme is being managed by the Department of Government Services (DGS) and can only be accessed through the portal on CFA members online. Members will need to confirm their eligibility, meet the criteria outlined and there is an appeals process if the system believes your information does not meet the CFA portion of the eligibility criteria. Delegates are keen to remind members that there is a misconception that volunteers can only apply for the rebate after they have paid their rates, when in fact a member can submit an application as soon as their rates notice has been issued. For any enquiries, support or to escalate issues you are having with the system there is an online form at https://service.vic.gov.au/find-services/housing-and-property/eligible-volunteers-rebate-scheme or phone 1300 778 931 during business hours.

ANNUAL FIREFIGHTER MEMORIAL SERVICE

Each year on the 1st Sunday in May or the closest Sunday to International Firefighters Day which falls on St. Florian's Day on 4 May (St. Florian is the Patron Saint of Firefighters) CFA holds a memorial service to remember those firefighters who gave their lives to protect others and to honour the personal sacrifices and commitment our firefighters make each and every day.

The 2025 service saw some changes to the service that were out of character for many members who have attended previous services and whose concerns have been raised and discussed with CFA. Following consultation, some changes for the 2026 service are expected to bring the service back into line with members suggestions and balance both the faith-based portions of the service and arrangements to appeal to non-faith-based attendees also.

CFA have also agreed to improve its notifications to members for the service and have been requested to update the contact lists more regularly. As part of our commitment to cater to both regional and metro attendees, CFA has agreed to alternate between the Emergency Services Memorial in Treasury gardens and regional locations, with this years' service to be held at Ballan on Sunday 3rd May.

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT HUB DATA

Following significant advocacy by delegates, CFA has rolled out many changes to the online Volunteer Recruitment Hub (VRH) with many more updates still to come. There have been many members who have commented on the length of time it takes from sign-up to being accepted as a member within the VRH system. CFA figures show that in 2023 it took up to 90 days to be ready to participate as a member. Following numerous updates and enhancements that time has now been reduced to 29 days. Further enhancements due this year are expected to improve the volunteer experience further. The VRH team continue to develop cheat sheets, user guides and help videos to assist potential members and brigades to navigate the system. If someone is having trouble with the system, you can register for assistance through members online or by emailing the volunteer recruitment hub – volrecruithub@cfa.vic.gov.au

Joint Operational Capability Committee

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PV STOP TRIALS

Members may recall this time last year we reported that CFA was looking into ways of combating fires from rooftop solar electricity systems and an innovative new product called PV Stop had come onto the market. Delegates were informed that a demonstration by the supplier of PV Stop has been arranged with the intent that a trail is being planned to run in selected brigades in District 8, 13 and 14 initially. The extinguisher style containers contain a thick liquid solution that when sprayed onto the solar panels instantly 'de-energises' the PV system. CFA has commissioned 26 PV Stop cylinders for the trial. The coating has challenges in how it is applied, and it has also been noted that while the pilot is underway there are very limited applications due to the risks associated with accessing rooftops. Only members with the required training and a current Safe Working At Heights (SWAH) qualification will be able to administer the product. We will keep you informed on the results of the trial.

BA SWAP AND GO PILOT

The Breathing Apparatus (BA) Cylinder Exchange pilot went live in District 11 just before Christmas and is aimed at giving volunteers the ability to "swap and go" BA cylinders. The new pilot is being co-ordinated through Bairnsdale Fire Brigade and is designed to improve operational efficiency and flexibility for volunteers by reducing the need for volunteers to wait while cylinders are refilled or having to wait for courier pick up and drop offs.

QR codes attached to each cylinder will be scanned and entered into the ServiceNow App and are stored in the database each time they are used and filled. The QR codes link to a unique identifier in the ServiceNow system, enabling accurate tracking and streamlined exchanges. Users will be able to view cylinder information at their brigade level, record transfers, report issues and view cylinder history. We will keep you updated as the pilot is completed, results assessed and rolled out across the rest of the state.

VOLUNTEER RESPONSE

It has to be acknowledged that members from across the state have done a remarkable job in combating the catastrophic fires since the start of the year and everyone from crews on the ground, strike team leaders, staging area managers, incident controllers and IMT members can all be very proud that every effort has been made to protect lives and property and to aim for a more positive outcome and in many areas the outcomes were more positive than in other areas. While the outlook for the remainder of the fire danger period still has brigades from every corner of the state on high alert lets celebrate the success's.

With the much-anticipated release of the CFA annual report recently there are some remarkable figures that show the incredible work volunteers do for their communities.

Over the 2024/25 reporting period volunteers attended 41,925 incidents and 81,940 total brigade turnouts across the state which is calculated at over 438,875 hours of volunteer time devoted to incidents. CFA volunteers also contributed over 5,500 shifts in IMT roles. The numbers just get more amazing when Community Safety is taken into consideration with 1,945 community events and informal engagement attended including CFA Open days. 2,680 smoke alarms were installed in at risk households and 4,774 hectares of land treated to reduce fire risk. These are just a few statistics that highlight the remarkable work that our 52,000 volunteers across the 1,208 brigades in every community.

Hold your heads up high everyone, you should be extremely proud of the effort and accomplishments but, the message to everyone during the fire danger period remains consistent, manage your fatigue, stay hydrated and stay safe – so everyone comes home safe.

Joint Operational Performance Committee

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INTEROPERABILITY

Delegates to the Operational Performance Committee have been keen to encourage CFA to support a better, more inclusive inter agency relationship in the future. Rather than each organisation duplicating systems, delegates have queried if there a better way to share technology to ensure all agencies are working from one source. Members used mapping as an example. There are currently three to four different mapping options available in both live and static situations within the emergency sector. While it was noted that different agencies use a mix of different platforms with both live and static data the benefits of using one mapping system were acknowledged. The committee are keen to advance and help develop a discussion paper that would assist all agencies in identifying the relevant elements, enabling a more structured consideration rather than future discussion at Committee level. It has been noted while mapping is just one element worth looking at there are others that could also be investigated over time.

FALSE ALARMS

Delegates to the committee are advocating for initiatives that would seek to reduce the prevalence of false alarms across the State. The Committee has requested CFA monitor and analyse the results of recent changes that have encouraged the disconnection of alarm signalling equipment (ASE's) where they are no longer required, and whether this has reduced the number of false alarms statewide. Delegates encouraged the further reduction of false alarms, and the benefits of using direct communications with facility owners to assist in this area. While severe weather can result in a waiver of the false alarm charge, delegates suggested consideration be given to waiving genuine false alarms where facility owners can demonstrate high levels of maintenance and efforts to ensure false alarms are minimised. The Committee considered if a standard information pack for all premises that highlights the importance of accurate site maps and detector locations could assist with a quicker response once brigades are in attendance. The committee noted the benefits of this onboarding concept for businesses, including the reduction of pre-planning work and costs on business for callouts.

AFTER ACTION REVIEWS (AAR)

With fire still burning across the state from what can only be described as a busy fire season - delegates are very keen to ensure that the many after-active reviews that will be conducted are done so in an effective, efficient, volunteer-friendly way, ensuring that everyone is able to contribute and document their experiences.

The ability to learn and improve in the way we fight fires, record interactions on the fireground, improve safety and ensure an effective use of volunteer's time is critical, from the fire front to the staging area. Learning from the many interactions across the myriads of complex and extended events is important in developing firefighters, incident control and inter agency training and ensuring that we don't repeat the mistakes of the past can only be done by listening to and recording what has happened to ensure CFA continues to make better use of the resources available.

Members who have something to add from their time at an incident can record their experiences in the Lessons Management system but should also engage with their local and group after action reviews to ensure this feedback is discussed and shared with their peers.

Delegates are investigating recent allegations from volunteers who have been raising concerns that some Districts may be sanitising results from local AAR's before sending them up the chain. One initiative to ensure this cannot occur would be to publish the AAR report to all attendees so that full transparency is provided following after-action reviews.

Joint People, Culture & Safety Committee

2 Minute Briefing

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CFA MEDICAL STANDARDS

VFBV continues to receive a high number of complaints from volunteers who find themselves trying to navigate CFA's new medical review processes. Delegates continue to advocate for a more timely and open process that will ensure volunteers are treated fairly and understand what the process is, and where they are in that process.

At the most recent meeting of the Joint Committee, delegates were informed that CFA had developed and written a new CFA Medical Standard to replace the AFAC medical guidelines that were developed by AFAC in 2006. The AFAC guidelines were never developed for agencies to use as a Standard, but rather as a guide to support and assist agencies with their medical methodology. Most importantly – they respected the principle that any medical processes must be practicable and respect the privacy and confidentiality of individuals. Importantly they enshrined the importance of agencies using their own consultative processes for any local application.

Therefore, delegates were surprised to learn that CFA had developed its own standard in secret, and without any engagement or consultation with VFBV. Under questioning, CFA representatives informed delegates that CFA would not be consulting on the new Standard but would engage VFBV over its implementation.

Delegates have now escalated this matter, and VFBV has informed CFA that we consider the lack of consultation to be a Charter breach, and that VFBV will not be supporting a Standard that has been developed without any consultation with VFBV or volunteers as is required under the CFA Act.

VFBV will continue to advocate for a medical process that is fair, transparent, timely and respects an individual's privacy. In particular, VFBV rejects any process that does not engage with an individual's own medical practitioner, or a standard that radically departs from every other State or Territory fire service across Australia without compelling reasons and evidence to support this approach. While we support medical standards that support the health and safety of all members, it is uncontroversial for volunteers to demand that something so personal and sensitive be developed in an open, transparent and consultative manner. VFBV has strongly urged CFA to reconsider its approach.

COMPLAINTS PROCESS UPDATE

CFA are currently dealing with 86 open complaint and discipline matters. This demonstrates a huge improvement in addressing the backlog of complaints that had built up over recent months and years. Delegates have encouraged CFA to maintain this progress. Delegates welcomed the news that the Issue Resolution team will be bolstered by five additional staff which doubles the team's capacity to deal with issue resolution in a timely manner. Each of the five new positions will work closely with an appointed Region. These people will act as a mentor/guide to District staff who are managing complaints and issues, in the hope that these issues can be dealt with locally, expediently and with the cooperation of Captains, BMT's and brigades. CFA are also engaging with VFBV to review the discipline process, end to end, under the new regulations and continue working on training for Referring Officers and Hearing Officers, and the restriction/ suspension of members in complaint matters. CFA have engaged an external provider to work on the design of digitised training modules, due for delivery late in 2026.

The recent Allen and Clarke review engaged with many volunteers in face-to-face sessions, online Town Hall sessions and further feedback via online QR code access. The Allen and Clarke report findings will be provided to joint committee members in the coming months and VFBV will update members accordingly. VFBV have observed a recent shift in the volunteer experience with the Issue Resolution team between both the claimant and respondent and are pleased to note that volunteers are reporting feeling better treated and that they are encountering a more open and transparent team making the process much less confronting and geared to resolving issues and ensuring poor behaviours are addressed quickly and proportionately. VFBV continue to engage regularly with all levels of the Issue Resolution team and sharing the experiences of volunteers and brigades. We will keep members informed as this important work continues.

Joint Technology & Innovation Committee

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RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

While many of our members are familiar with the highly visible, front-facing technology improvements within CFA — such as new pagers, replacement radios, and mobile data capability projects — fewer may be aware of the significant work being undertaken within the Research and Development (R&D) area.

These pressures impact our volunteer members, CFA's operational processes, and the funding model that supports agencies across the sector. It may seem obvious, but emergency services must invest in research and development if we are to effectively meet these challenges into the future.

The CFA Research and Development team are currently engaged in more than 40 projects, with priority given to initiatives that will deliver the greatest impact for volunteers and operational capability. The CFA Research Strategic Plan provides a long-term, structured approach that aligns with the CFA Outcomes Framework. It also strengthens collaboration with Universities, DEECA, Parks Victoria, FRV, EMV and other fire agencies across Australia with the assistance of AFAC.

Of particular interest to committee members was a demonstration of the Bushfire and Analytics Tool (BAT) dashboard, which is now beginning trial phases. This project aims to support operational decision-making by integrating historical, current, and forecast weather data, fuel information, and fire incident data into a single, comprehensive dashboard. The information is visualised across multiple spatial and temporal scales, providing a clearer and more dynamic understanding of fire behaviour. Importantly, the platform also offers early access to experimental models and products, enabling users to trial emerging science and provide valuable feedback.

The research team has compiled completed fire reconstructions from dozens of incident reports dating back to the 1960s. This data enables the development of advanced fire behaviour models and simulation tools, which provide evidence-based insights into how effectively bush and grass fires are being suppressed today.

Another ongoing project generating valuable operational data is the Creswick 'Smart Tanker' tanker initiative. This tanker is fitted with flow rate meters, cameras, and high-frequency GPS tracking. These tools allow the research team to monitor water usage during incidents, providing measurable evidence of suppression effectiveness through detailed data analysis and case studies.

These examples represent only a portion of the innovative work being undertaken. VFBV delegates will continue to advocate and monitor progress across these projects throughout the year.

SUPPLEMENTARY ALETING SYSTEM (SAS)

Release 12 of SAS was available as of 8 December 2025. This release introduces Apple Car Play as well important maintenance updates as well as performance improvements. Android Auto was introduced in Version 9. Both Apple Car and Android Auto allow members to view and navigate to incidents via their cars built in display. For all the information on SAS including user guide, training videos and FAQ's visit: www.cfa.vic.gov.au/sas

PAGER REPLACEMENT

The pager replacement process is coming to an end with scheduled completion in April this year. Currently there are approx. 7000 pagers highlighted as not being returned for multiple reasons and as this is a like for like swap this may end up with CFA having to pay for missing pagers. CFA continues to encourage brigades and members if they have a pager that is not being used please contact your district to arrange for its return this will allow CFA to have a clearer idea when the replacement process can be completed.

Joint Training Committee

2 Minute Briefing

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AFAC TRAINING PEER REVIEW

In 2021, CFA commissioned AFAC to undertake a peer review of CFA's training systems, with the aim of providing advice on key initiatives to improve the development and delivery of training within CFA. Since that time, the Joint Training Committee (JTC) has had regular input into this work and continues to monitor progress. The AFAC review made 14 recommendations. To date, CFA report that eight recommendations have been completed, including establishing a single point of decision-making for training, centralising control of training records and materials, implementing formal feedback mechanisms for volunteers and staff, improving the engagement and management of Volunteer Instructors, delivering nationally recognised competencies, registering with ASQA, strengthening engagement with other agencies, and ongoing monitoring of progress against recommendations.

However, several important items remain outstanding. These include developing comprehensive capability and training pathways, replacing BOSP with a more effective tool, finalising IMT training pathways and courses, revising CFA's scope of registration, exploring simpler pathways for small rural brigade members progressing through GFF and implementing a skills maintenance framework. Of these initiatives, all but the development of a comprehensive skills maintenance framework have had significant progress towards their completion. Delegates will continue to monitor progress.

TRAINING PATHWAYS

Many members should now be familiar with the Training Pathways that CFA began implementing in the second half of 2024. These pathways clearly define the prerequisites for courses, the training required for specific roles, and any formal endorsements that must be in place before a member can undertake those roles.

Under the new framework, any member who is not currently endorsed for a role will be required to complete all of the training set out in the relevant pathway before being endorsed. However, members who are already endorsed for a role will be able to maintain that endorsement without being required to complete additional training, even where they may not have completed all prerequisite courses listed in the pathway. This transition approach is intended to recognise existing skills and experience and avoid disadvantaging long-serving members. It recognises on the job training vs classroom learning.

It is critical that Captains ensure member endorsements are accurately recorded and up to date in the LMS. Correct records will allow members to be appropriately "grandfathered" into their current roles under the new training pathways. Any member who currently holds endorsements for roles such as Strike Team Leader that require District endorsement should check LMS to ensure that these are recorded in the members records. Any Brigades or members experiencing difficulties in this process should contact their District training team in the first instance and if it can't be resolved, can then raise the issue to CFA Headquarters through the Training Complaints system on Members Online.

MEMBERS ONLINE CHANGES

Delegates have long voiced frustration at inconsistent or delayed information flowing from CFA, particularly in relation to changes in training requirements and processes. CFA have acknowledged these past shortfalls and over the past 12–18 months has made significant improvements to the Training section of Members Online, creating a single, central point for training-related information. The updated pages provide clear guidance on how to enrol in courses, the latest news and updates from the Training Department, LMS user information, and step-by-step guides for Captains and Brigade Training Officers to access reports. The site also includes information for members interested in becoming more involved in training delivery such as the process to become a Volunteer Instructor, information from the Regional Training teams and how members can raise complaints and provide feedback on their training experience. The Training section can be found at: Members Online → Brigades / Operational → Training