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MEDIA RELEASE

FIREFIGHTERS LEARN FROM INSIDE BURNING HOUSE

Volunteer firefighters usually try to save homes but five eastern Victorian CFA brigades have had a rare opportunity to train from inside a purposely-lit burning house.

East Gippsland Water had planned to demolish the old brick house at Metung but instead asked if local brigades could use it for training.

Metung Fire Brigade Captain Trevor Blundell said volunteers in the Tambo Group were quick to jump at the opportunity.

After all relevant permits were granted, more than 30 volunteers from Metung, Johnsonville, Bruthen, Lakes Entrance, and Bairnsdale observed the fire and took part in training drills.

“It’s the first time we’ve had an opportunity to train with an actual burning house and it was an invaluable exercise,” Captain Blundell said.

“Normally if we have a structure fire it’s go, go, go, so to sit back and actually watch a house fire from the start we could learn about heat and smoke and fire behaviour,” he said.

Sixteen volunteers used breathing apparatus to carry out search and rescue training with two dummies located in the house. A breathing apparatus support vehicle from Traralgon attended to support them.

The fire was lit in two bedrooms by East Gippsland Water representatives. Several CFA volunteers stayed inside to watch the smoke build and the fire spread.

They monitored the heat and intensity of the fire with a thermal imaging camera which reached more than 800 degrees.

Once the fire became too intense and the smoke load reached a pre-determined point, the volunteers evacuated the building and observed from outside.

“Watching the fire take hold was very interesting,” Captain Blundell said. “It was starved of oxygen for a little while and then it got heat and ignition and away it went.”

“For those of us with breathing apparatus it was quite comfortable for a long duration, but members with only a face shield and personal protective equipment could only stay inside

for a couple of minutes because of the heat. It was helpful to determine how long we could do an internal attack before having to leave for safety reasons.”

The volunteer firefighters didn't do any offensive or defensive firefighting during the exercise.

“It was purely for observation and we thank East Gippsland Water for this invaluable training opportunity,” Captain Blundell said.

About 80 per cent of the house fully engulfed within 30 minutes.

Captain Blundell said the exercise was carried out following strict safety protocols,

The Metung brigade has 35 members and attends about 30 incidents each year, including about 10 structure fires.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) CEO Andrew Ford said this type of training ensured volunteer brigades continue to provide a professional public safety service that is effective and affordable.

“Our brigades are well trained and equipped and exercises such as this help our dedicated volunteers to continue their good work for the community.”

Mr Ford said volunteers are part of the fabric of society and contribute to community resilience.

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