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MEDIA RELEASE

VFBV disappointed by funding cut for Fire Wise newspaper

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) has slammed the CFA's decision to stop funding the Fire Wise publication as showing appalling disregard for volunteers.

"VFBV is extremely disappointed with CFA's action to cancel funding support to this vital volunteer communications and consultation tool," VFBV Chief Executive Officer Andrew Ford said.

"Volunteers deserve a voice and Fire Wise is part of that voice; cutting funding is another step towards gagging of volunteers' right and ability to have a voice," Mr Ford said.

Fire Wise, formerly known as The Fireman, has been distributed monthly since 1947. The CFA has been an official supporter for nearly 50 years but has told Fire Wise its grant of about \$5000 a month would no longer be paid and that any future payments would only be 'fee for service' for advertising.

Mr Ford said the newspaper was an integral part of the CFA's ability to communicate with and hear from volunteers.

He said its close association with the CFA had never reduced its editorial independence but there had never been an instance of censoring or restricting any CFA or government organisational, policy or change announcements.

"CFA's decision to suddenly cancel their small funding support to this valuable volunteer communications tool, with no explanation of the logic, no consultation with volunteers and no regard for what it means for volunteers demonstrates a growing attempt to block and prevent volunteers' views being heard," Mr Ford said.

"The cost of CFA's support to Fire Wise is a tiny fraction of its budget and an even tinier fraction of the volunteer connection, motivation, goodwill and sense of belonging it helps create."

"This is another sad step in sapping the spirit from CFA volunteers and a disregard for fundamental things that help keep volunteers motivated. This is an appalling disregard for volunteers and their contribution to making CFA the wonderful organisation it is today."

Mr Ford said many long serving and dedicated volunteers were cynical about the decision and frustrated that it was another way of the CFA shifting costs back on volunteers.

CFA estimates that volunteers contribute service to Victoria worth more than \$1 billion every year. “The contribution to Fire Wise was a miniscule fraction of this but is a core way of sustaining strong volunteering and adhering to the spirit of the volunteer charter,” Mr Ford said.

VFBV will work with Fire Wise to ensure the publication survives and Mr Ford urged volunteers to maintain their subscriptions.

More than 5000 copies of Fire Wise are distributed to CFA volunteer brigades and individual volunteer subscribers across Victoria for a small subscription fee plus there is a growing following of online subscribers.

“Every hard copy is shared from volunteer to volunteer at local community fire stations and amongst families, friends and supporters of volunteers over kitchen tables and other local gathering places, volunteers don’t want to lose this connection,” Mr Ford added.

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