



# VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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## PLANNED BURNS AS TRAINING

For many years, VFBV has been calling for a holistic approach to planned burning, and for CFA to promote the training advantages of participating in planned burns. Planned burns allow newer members to observe and learn fire behaviour, and provide an opportunity for experienced veterans to pass on their knowledge to others.

Volunteers on the VFBV/CFA Joint Community Safety Committee are pleased to see that recent planned burns have developed into exercises, not just in fire behaviour and fuel load interactions but are also offering learnings in weather behaviour, impact on flora and fauna, bush heritage and Indigenous fire management practices.

The camps provide practical hands-on experience and each participant is tasked with both coaching and mentoring roles, allowing involvement by volunteers across all aspects of the planned burn.

Recent camps have also involved Traditional Owners, Trust for Nature (landowners) bird scientists, Forest Fire Management Victoria staff, plantation owners and CFA career staff. The exercises worked well, building valuable relationships and creating an atmosphere of co-operation in complex burn scenarios. The Committee has requested CFA promote the camps and provide brigades with opportunities to become involved in upcoming Burn Camps. Brigades are encouraged to keep an eye out for future burn camps and get involved.

## MEDIUM TANKER EVALUATION

VFBV will shortly be conducting volunteer evaluation of current build Medium Tankers.

The purpose of the evaluation is to gather feedback from Brigades that have been issued with Medium Tankers and assess how the cab chassis, locker configuration and base equipment is operating, and if there are any areas of improvement that could be suggested for future builds.

Part of a continuous improvement initiative, VFBV has offered to run the evaluation and will shortly be inviting feedback from any members who wish to provide

## HAZARDOUS TREE

In order to comply with EMV's Joint Standard Operating Procedure J8.03 CFA is required to update and distribute its Hazardous Tree awareness and training materials, and ensure all members responding to bushfire incidents have undergone the new Hazardous Tree Management information training package.

During discussions, VFBV has reiterated its position that all training be made available to volunteers via flexible

their thoughts and experiences of how the Medium Tankers are working in the field.

Keep an eye out for the survey and if you have any feedback or design ideas that you think would benefit future builds – please get involved.

## Remember, Celebrate, Respect

By Andrew Ford, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

As this edition of 'Fire Wise' hits the streets our calendar brings us to three quite different and important reminders. Firstly, St Florian's Day or International Firefighters Day on 4 May, when firefighters and communities across the world show support and recognition of our firefighters commitment and dedication, remember those lost or injured in the line of duty and say thank you.

And on Sunday 7 May many of us will have come together at Churchill or at other special places to remember CFA members who have given their lives in service to protecting their communities. My thoughts and prayers are for the families, friends and loved ones of those who have died in the line of duty and also for all

those that have suffered loss or injury or sickness through their work, dedication and commitment to protecting their communities.

The second week of May (from 8-14 May) is National Volunteer Week, an annual and national celebration to acknowledge the generous commitment of our volunteers.

Generally our CFA volunteers shy away from recognition or thanks but I think it is really important for every volunteer to take a moment to reflect on the incredible and essential contribution you make to your communities and to communities across Victoria and beyond. You should feel good and be immensely proud of what you do, your professionalism and your commitment deserves to be celebrated.

Numerous reviews have documented and acknowledged that CFA's volunteer based resource model is the only approach capable of economically and practically dealing with the number, scale and simultaneous occurrence of fires and other emergencies experienced in Victoria.

The CFA volunteers' contribution to the community is incalculable with the value of labour alone estimated to be in excess of one billion dollars per year, let alone the contribution to community resilience, social connections, local knowledge and the substantial replacement cost or capacity loss if volunteers weren't there.

There will be plenty of celebration and recognition for

the work you do and my everlasting hope is that decision makers and others who influence public policy will continue to understand and respect the capacity, professionalism and essential contribution CFA volunteers make to public safety.

CFA is a modern and contemporary fire and emergency service, protecting not just country Victoria but also to more than 60% of metropolitan Melbourne and provincial centres and townships across the State. I am hopeful that times like National Volunteer Week can be used as a catalyst to remind everyone of the vital and huge volunteer resource that currently exists in CFA and other emergency service volunteers.

We also need to take the opportunity provided by National Volunteer Week to recognise and thank those who appreciate, respect and support the work we do as volunteers. To the families, employers, friends, decision makers; to the paid staff who work with and in support of volunteers; to our brother and sister volunteers in other agencies; and to our communities – THANK YOU for your ongoing support and respect.

As I write this, it would be foolish to ignore the fact that there is significant disquiet amongst many in our volunteer ranks. I understand this and desperately wish I could fix it. Over the past year and months I am constantly approached by volunteers and brigades who are concerned that the capacity, professionalism and essential need for our CFA volunteers may have been forgotten by some decision makers and politicians. Again, it would be foolish to ignore the actions and public messaging that give rise to this feeling.

Rather than sit and wait for the train wreck, I want to encourage all of you to use this month to get out and be loud about what volunteers do and what needs to be done to maintain and grow this wonderful resource for future generations. Please activate now, talk to everyone you know, to your local member of parliament, to your local community clubs and networks – thank them for their support; educate them if they are not aware of what you do; ask for their support to ensure the CFA model is respected, supported and sustained; and explain to them the consequence of a future where CFA volunteer capacity is reduced or where the cost of the fire service levy goes through the roof due to lack of respect and support for volunteers.

Explain the integral relationship.

VFBV encourages all members to consider applying for the forthcoming VFBV Board positions with four positions expiring 1 October 2017.

Applications for the VFBV Board close 1 August 2017 – further information is on our website or can be obtained from the VFBV office on 9886 1141 or emailing j.laing@vfbv.com.au



tionship between CFA volunteers in your local community and the surge capacity support that can be drawn from CFA volunteers across outer metropolitan Melbourne and other parts of Victoria when required.

And, in preparation for the potential that the rumoured CFA carve up could be a real backroom plan, explain to them the breadth of services and risk environments CFA volunteer brigades currently provide; the vital CFA surge capacity that the whole CFA volunteer network provides for Victoria; the way volunteer brigades can be supported (not replaced) by paid staff in busy areas so that CFA can maintain service to growing communities and at the same time retain the important surge capacity that comes from the brigades in these busy urbanised areas.

Help them understand that talk of carving CFA up into a paid urban service and a volunteer bushfire service, just to satisfy an industrial agenda, is a costly and potentially disastrous nonsense. Ask them to be ready to help you send a loud message to protect CFA and the CFA volunteer ethos.

Sadly I know lots of volunteers who are feeling fed up and many who have already either withdrawn, resigned or preparing to resign. My message to everyone is that we need to stay, we need to continue to serve our communities and we need to stay proud about the work we do.

Please be really clear, nothing in this message is about being anti change, or anti paid staff or anti Government. Of course we need to evolve and change as communities change, of course we need to grow and adapt our capacity to meet changing community needs and of course we need to support and be supported by paid staff in various roles. Our paid CFA staff, along with all of the paid workers and other volunteers in the emergency sector, do a fantastic job and it is vitally important that we respect one another and work well together as one team.

But my message is strong on several key points and that is that any contemplation of change to the CFA model must not be done just to pacify an industrial agenda or secret deal; must not be done without transparent, fair and genuine consultation with volunteers; and must not be driven by anything other than the interests of the community.

And if the play is foul, we should call it, protest it and actively contest it. Please stay in touch via your local VFBV delegates and VFBV website for further updates.

## ROP SAFETY CUSHIONS

The Joint Equipment & Infrastructure Committee reviewed volunteer feedback from the field trails over the summer season of the Tanker ROP Safety Cushion prototypes.

These cushions have been designed to minimise the vibration of the vehicle and road being transferred into the spine and back of members, and prevent members being slid from side to side and coming in contact with the ROPS during travel.

Feedback was overwhelming positive, with the Committee selecting a design and material and recommending a funding proposal be prepared to advance a retro-fit roll-out of the cushions to all Tankers with external ROPS.

We will keep you apprised of progress.

At the time of going to press, there has not yet been an announcement of this year's 2017/18 Volunteer Emergency Services Equipment Program (VESEP), however VFBV encourages Brigades and Groups, as it does every year - to be planning well in advance and have their support documents at the ready. This year's program will be the 18th since it's launch in the year 2000.

VESEP contributes \$2 for every \$1 of funding contributed by Brigade/Group/Unit, and hardship provisions are available for Brigades that can demonstrate they are unable to fund the one third contribution.

When the program is officially announced by the State Government - VESEP grant applications usually need to be with your OM within

approximately six weeks of the opening so your local DPC (District Planning Committee) can then meet the following week to consider and prioritise applications – so plan ahead and get ready.

For assistance in preparing your application, or getting started on planning/fundraising for possible future funding rounds, talk to your VFBV State Councillor or VFBV Support Officer, or visit our website for case studies on successful applications from past years. VFBV also has an Application Help Pack which it updates each year once the program is announced, that provides templates and other useful information to assist with your application. Previous VFBV Application Help Packs are available from our website.

## VESEP UPDATE

## POSITION VACANT – VFBV Policy & Advocacy Officer

- Key Strategic Advocacy & Communications Role  
 - Facilitate and Formulate Policy

VFBV is seeking to appoint a talented and motivated Policy and Advocacy Officer to work fulltime based at our Burwood East office involving broad ranging and rewarding work that supports and benefits our CFA Brigade members across Victoria. This is a key role in the small VFBV team.

The VFBV Policy and Advocacy Officer will play a vital role helping VFBV to work with volunteers to research issues, develop our position on key issues and advocate this position to decision makers and the media.

The person we are looking for will have strong analytical and research skills along with strong verbal and written communication skills. Relevant tertiary qualifications or experience in a related discipline is desirable. Highly developed interpersonal, facilitation and time management skills and the ability to establish and build relationships and work collaboratively with, and influence, a range of external and internal stakeholders is essential.

In addition to relevant skills, the successful applicant will need to have demonstrated empathy with the volunteer culture, be a good listener, and can navigate through complex issues resolution, be a self-starter and have a passion to improve arrangements that benefit the welfare and efficiency of CFA volunteers.

A copy of the Position Description and Application Process can be found on our website or by calling the VFBV office on (03) 9886 1141

## UPCOMING VFBV BOARD VACANCIES

All members are encouraged to apply for the VFBV Board positions as advertised in the last edition of 'Fire Wise'.

VFBV aims to attract a broad range of unique and diverse skills, perspectives and abilities to our organisa-