



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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Smoke alarms: start a conversation today

Delegates to the Joint VFBV/CFA Community Safety Committee discussed the findings of a joint CFA/MFB research project on community behaviours, attitude and perceptions around the purchase and maintenance of smoke alarms. Many of the findings were unsettling.

For example, only 13% of respondents mentioned house fires when thinking about safety issues in the home, and there was much confusion over where the smoke alarms should be located and how often smoke alarms needed to be replaced with 36% of respondents having never replaced their smoke alarms. This year the agencies will be focussing on reminding people that all smoke alarms (hard-wired AND stand alone) need to be replaced every 10 years.

We, as volunteers are perfectly placed to have these conversations and help inform our communities to understand home fire safety and reduce the likelihood of residential fires. CFA have several brochures available to Brigades that wish to use it as a conversation starter.

Key messaging includes; Photoelectric smoke alarms are more effective and less prone to false alarms; smoke alarms should be tested monthly; smoke alarms should be dusted, and 9 volt replaceable batteries should be changed over annually; and all smoke alarms need to be replaced every 10 years. Did you know that if you don't have a working smoke alarm installed in your home and a fire occurs; you are 57% more likely to suffer property loss and damage; you are 26% more likely to suffer serious injuries; and you are four times more likely to die?

VOLUNTEER INJURY AND CLAIM TRENDS

At a recent meeting of the VFBV/CFA Joint HR, Welfare and OH&S Committee, delegates discussed key contributing factors involved in the injury and near miss reports. These contributing factors are reflective of the common tasks being performed across CFA, primary involved in training and emergency response activities.

The information provided highlights that injuries and near misses during training activities are the most common and this is a timely call to apply higher levels of risk control and to improve safety around these training activities. Sprain and strain injuries remain the most common injury being sustained across CFA, which reflects the physical impacts of the manual handling activities being performed.

Preventative programs have targeted key risk areas such as improving the ergonomic design of appliances/equipment, health and fitness programs and back care education among other initiatives. The 2016/17 period is tracking slightly lower than the previous five years' trends.

VFBV has requested CFA consider targeted messaging and initiatives to highlight the most common causes through case studies which could then be themed across the year as a safety share topic.

Licence testing costs reimbursement

VFBV has been advocating for increased CFA support to cover the reimbursement of heavy vehicle licensing testing for volunteers.

The VFBV/CFA Joint Training Committee has been receiving quarterly update reports on CFA's progress towards a new agreement with VicRoads which would streamline CFA licence processes. The State's Driving Coordinator has advised the Committee that significant improvements sought by CFA are close to being approved by VicRoads.

DCO Training has also advised that CFA have now completed an options paper covering the concerns raised by the Committee, and has presented this option paper to the Chief Officer which recommends a new funding policy for licence reimbursement.

The Committee has also been strongly advo-

Monitor hazardous atmospheres

Delegates to the VFBV/CFA Joint Training Committee have requested that CFA review its current approach to 'Monitoring Hazardous Atmospheres' training to consider a two phased approach to gas detection equipment operators. This would allow equipment operators to go through an equipment familiarisation and differential learning program to build awareness as an operator, with a more advanced course to offer more complex training in how to interpret the readings and subsequent corrective actions as a supervisor. CFA has agreed to investigate options and will come back to the Committee with recommendations.

ating for greater use of driver simulation training, which could be offered at strategic locations across Victoria and would give members access to much greater and additional driver training and skills maintenance in a safe environment.

CFA has indicated its in principle support. The Committee will continue to monitor.

FIRE SERVICES RESTRUCTURE

By Andrew Ford, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

I would be surprised if everyone reading this hasn't been tuned in to the big issue that has dominated much of the discussion throughout the CFA and Victorian fires services over the past month – that being the Victorian Government's proposed legislation to restructure Victoria's fire services.

Related to this, and in our view inappropriately linked in the same legislation, was a proposed legislation for presumptive rights compensation for firefighters.

Members will be aware that the legislation did not get passed in the Victorian Upper House and the decision was made to refer it to a Parliamentary Select Committee. The Select Committee has been formed with extremely tight time frames with submissions invited and due by 7 July, then a quick round of public hearings and the date of 8 August set for the committee to report its findings.

Volunteers across Victoria have raised their concerns with VFBV and many of you

have been actively writing to and speaking with your local MPs and other decision makers to make them aware of your local concerns. This conversation is extremely important and I encourage you to continue very active dialogue and communication with your local MPs and all Victorian Upper House MPs who will ultimately decide the fate of CFA once the Select Committee hands the issue back to parliament for decision on next steps. VFBV will continue to be actively involved in this discussion but your local energy and conversations with the MPs really makes all the difference.

I want to congratulate and thank volunteers and others outside CFA who have helped achieve a closer scrutiny of this flawed legislation before a decision is made. Keep up the good work.

Many of us have been extremely busy meeting with MPs and decision makers; and discussing/preparing submissions to the Select Committee in the two weeks leading up to 7 July. There has been unprecedented conversation throughout our VFBV networks, District Councils and State Council and VFBV has made a formal submission to the committee incorporating the extensive input received from volunteers across the state. Thank you again for this.

On the eve of this edition going to print VFBV has just come out of our public hearing and presentation to the Select Committee. We were called at short notice to attend a hearing on 7 July. VFBV and I think it gave us a good opportunity to reinforce some key points. VFBV was represented at this hearing by President Nev Jones, Adam Barnett and myself.

It is impossible to cover all of the issues raised at the hearing in this short space but a snapshot of some of the key issues is captured below. You can visit the VFBV website to access a full copy of the VFBV submission.

At a summary level we were able to reinforce our dissatisfaction with the complete lack of consultation prior to the legislation being tabled in Parliament and also our huge disappointment that the proposed legislation immorally linked the two totally separate issues - firefighter cancer presumptive rights compensation and the proposed restructuring of Victoria's fire services. We also raised our con-



cern with the presumptive legislation aspects which are NOT the same as the well regarded QLD model and DO NOT treat volunteers and paid staff equally.

We reinforced to the committee that volunteers interests are to ensure we get this right and to ensure the motivation to make changes is driven by a desire for an outcome that is in the best interest of the community; is transparent and is workable and is not just to serve a hidden industrial or EBA agenda.

We were able to explain to the committee that experience and reviews have shown us again and again that the best approach to public safety is to embed public safety ethos and practice in local communities. And that the CFA community based model, where emergency service volunteers and paid staff work in a fully integrated manner and where volunteers are empowered, responsible and valued based on their training and experience (not pay status), for both local service delivery and major incident management roles, is a best practice model regarded world-wide.

We emphasised our concern that the CFA model is being dismantled, and dismantled for the wrong reasons. A model recognised as vital to providing Victoria, one of the most fire prone areas in the world, with the capacity and capability to deal not only with local service demand but also to have an ability to deal with major disasters when these occur.

We explained how every CFA brigade will be impacted because the proposal carves out all of the operational middle management, field support and brigade support roles. We outlined the problems caused by the proposal to strip these people out of CFA, transfer their employment to FRV under work conditions and an EBA negotiated by FRV, and then second them back to CFA under arrangements that mean CFA Chief Officer will not have adequate autonomy, authority and full control of this vital component of the CFA workforce.

We explained to the com-

mittee that no-one is saying there isn't going to be a need to grow and supplement current CFA capacity as urban service demand increases, and there may well be a need for more paid firefighters.

As usual, this should be driven by operational evidence and need identified by the Chief Officer, and not by any other agenda. Of course the fire services need to modernise and we pointed out the fire services have done, and continue to run a program of continuous improvement to ensure our communities receive the best service they can. Of course there may be communities where the service demand comes to exceed the capacity of volunteers, and therefore volunteers may need to be supplemented (not replaced) with paid staff at these locations. And when this happens there should be a range of options looked at including building the volunteer capacity; prevention activities to reduce fire activity in the first place; reduce false alarms and nuisance calls; providing non operational support to reduce workload; and supplement brigades with paid fire fighters so 'together' with the volunteers, there is the capacity to meet the community needs.

We explained in detail to the committee that the principle of supplementing not replacing volunteers is this way you get to sustain the volunteer capacity and add the paid firefighter or other support capacity you need, keeping up with community demand and keeping all of the other benefits of active volunteerism.

And for some on the committee who didn't seem to know this already we were able to explain the fact that this model ALREADY EXISTS – it is the current CFA model. The capacity to add additional paid firefighters to CFA brigades where service demand requires it is already there in the CFA legislation; it already happens; and continuously over the past years there are CFA brigades being transitioned from volunteer only to volunteer/paid integrated brigades. To say that this legislation is required to enable Victoria to service growing urban areas is not correct.

I think the committee now has some very solid information at their disposal to be convinced that you don't need to dismantle CFA to grow capacity to meet urban growth. You don't need to dismantle CFA to continually evolve and modernise the fire services.

The proposed restructure is not a modernisation of the fire services but a backward step, and energy should instead be focused on improving the cultures of the respective agencies and ensuring other agenda's don't prevent or restrict the support that volunteers need.

The Select Committee will continue their work over the coming weeks so stay tuned, keep up your active input and conversations and once again thank you for being an active part of the volunteer voice on this vitally important matter.

PUMPING PIT RECOMMISSIONING FUNDING SHORTFALL

VFBV have reported to CFA that Brigades are encountering difficulties getting CFA funding for the recommissioning of Brigade Pumping Pits, with Regions/Districts advising they do not have available funds within their budgets.

The Joint Training Committee has requested a State Budget be provided to assist with this initiative, or support to the Regions/Districts to prioritize sufficient funds.

DCO Training has advised that pumping pits now come under Infrastructure Services and he will advocate on behalf of the Committee to that department. VFBV has also been advised the issue should be escalated with the Chief Officer, which it will now do. The Committee will continue to monitor.

Screen capture of VFBV's animated surge capacity video which is available from the website - www.vfbv.com.au

