



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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AFFILIATION REMINDER

The number of Brigades affiliating with VFBV for 2017/18 is on track to match and probably exceed last year's record number, a sign of continued strong support for the association's work on behalf of volunteers.

A record 95% of Brigades affiliated with VFBV in 2016/17, and this year a number of Brigades have affiliated with VFBV for the first time in many years. If you are not sure whether your Brigade or Group's VFBV Affiliation and Brigade's VFBV Volunteer Welfare Fund subscription have been paid, contact your Secretary as soon as possible.

The modest cost of \$80 for VFBV affiliation is the same for all Brigades and Groups.

We also strongly encourage Brigades to subscribe to the VFBV Welfare Fund in the interests of supporting your members in times of personal hardship. Last year, the Welfare Fund distributed over \$176,000 to volunteers and their families in need. For more information visit the VFBV website www.vfbv.com.au and go to the Member Services area.

For any enquiries, contact your VFBV State Councillors or call us on (03) 9886 1141.

EXCITING COURSE: PLACES STILL AVAILABLE

District Council's continue to roll out the VFBV Delegate Development – Engaging Diversity Training course.

The 2 day course is available to all members, including current delegates, aspiring delegates or anyone looking to do some professional development and wanting to increase their leadership and management type skills to enable better Brigade and District Council involvement.

The course has been put together using a blended learning model, combining face to face and out of session work that students can do in their own time at their own pace.

The training will be delivered over two face to face workshop sessions, with a four to six week gap between sessions to provide time for students to complete some out of session work and assignment. Travel reimbursement is available to all participants attending the course.

Feedback from recent participants has been very encouraging.

A recent participant said; *"I was a bit dubious about the program to start, but once I got there it was great. I think the interaction and discussion as well as the exercises will help me to fulfil my role in and outside of my brigade duties."*

Another said; *"I found the program fast-paced, fun and thought provoking. It was challenging and rewarding to step outside my comfort zone to speak up and engage with others. It was equally rewarding to listen to others and gain different perspectives."*

I learned valuable and transferable skills in communication and problem solving. Skills that are vital as a delegate and in everyday life."

Places are still available, and you can get more information and register for a course by contacting VFBV Support Officer Mark Dryden on 0428 767 258.

This month's courses are at;
District 8: Sunday 12 November @ Skye;
District 12: Saturday 25 November @ Seymour;
District 23: Sunday 26 November @ Benalla

PREPARE AND FOCUS

by Andrew Ford, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Here we are only just getting over last Christmas and its November already.

It is now that time of the year when communities and brigades across Victoria are well into their summer preparedness and whilst brigades continue to deal with the day to day fires and emergencies that occur year-round there is also that anxious air of what is to come in the summer months ahead.

There is always lots of forecasting and different views about what we are in for - but the consensus amongst the experts, fuel loads, dryness and early fires in some parts of the State, are all pointing to this being a serious fire season at the least.

Globally there have been a number of telling reminders and tragic loss of life due to major fires including those in California, Spain and Portugal. Our thoughts and prayers go to those who have lost their lives, loved ones, homes and livelihood and also those emergency service personnel and others who are battling these major fires.

The devastation wreaked by fires such as those in California, Spain, and Portugal are also stark reminders of the often catastrophic impact of fire and the reality that Victoria is one of the most fire prone areas in the world.

For as long as I can remember Victoria has taken pride in the fact that we have one of the greatest fire services in the world thanks to our highly trained and enormous volunteer capacity and because of the existing integrated team of volunteers and paid staff working together and in support of each other as one and as equals.

And yes, I do imply a dig here at the people who want to denigrate it or rip it apart and ask anyone in a position of decision making power to stop and think about what legacy your own decisions and influence will leave in terms of the future sustainability of a thriving CFA. And be clear, I think the current fire service

reform plan and attitude of some toward what the CFA is at its core - is heading us in a disastrously wrong direction.

Beyond the sadness arising from any life loss or major community devastation, the recent major fires in other parts of the world reinforce my deep concern about the possibility that the reckless proposal to dismantle the CFA may have already triggered a slippery slide that will weaken Victoria's ability to deal with major emergencies in the future.

I hear it in the voices, and see it in the faces of the many volunteers who share with me their concerns of the low morale triggered by the slippery slide that has started. But - it is not beyond repair. As I have said to many who are wondering why they should keep bothering - for now my advice is to stay patient, keep your resolve, get on with what we do for our communities and also stay vigilant and prepared to redouble our efforts if attempts are made to ram through flawed policy or politically driven restructure of the fire services and particularly if the current flawed legislation proposal is not taken off the table.

Like many volunteers I speak to, I do not look back on the past year with much fondness. It has been a frustrating journey to say the least and I am constantly asked when will the Government take the proposed Fire Service restructure off the table and start genuinely respecting volunteers so that we can get on with focussing on something positive and get on with serving the community as we have done year in year out, day in day out.

Sadly, the reality is that despite the Victorian Government's Fire Service legislation failing to yet be passed or even considered in detail by the Victorian Parliament Upper House it seems our concerns about the fundamental flaws contained within it have still not been heard by some.

Even though the legislation has barely been debated in the Upper House and despite all indications that it does not have the support required to be passed, the Government has had it listed as an agenda item for each of the recent sittings of Parliament so its fate is still not final.

Regardless of the fact that the legislation has not yet been supported by Parliament, it does look like the Government and CFA are bullishly pushing on with some elements of the reform program and VFBV shares the concern of many volunteers that this this highly inappropriate. The big question is what will it take to bring things back to order and transparent process?

As a long serving volunteer said to me earlier this week "there is something very fishy going on and perhaps the recently proposed Royal Commission (into Victoria's Fire Service) is the only way to truly get to the bottom of it"

VFBV's submission to the



Fire Services Reform Bill Select Committee Inquiry proposed the best way forward is that the legislation should not proceed nor be supported until it has been subject to a proper, transparent review and impact analysis. VFBV's submission to the select committee was that a proper process of inquiry, problem analysis and solution development, done with genuine engagement and transparency would be the best way to set the foundations for improving culture, trust, respect, leadership and harmony within and across the fire services.

We have said we would welcome such a process and any opportunity to actively participate in it. Certainly a Royal Commission would provide such a process. Based on the discussions I have had with many volunteers, and also from the 'quiet' discussions I have with many well regarded paid officers throughout the sector it seems most people agree.

Victoria's fire services arrangements are so vitally important we cannot afford to get it wrong and the best and most powerful instrument for fair and transparent analysis is certainly a probing and highly focussed Royal Commission.

Whilst some people will be tired of reviews, we are definitely more tired of the games being played and the hidden agendas dragging CFA down. And we cannot afford to let tiredness or despair make us give up on the hope of a proper outcome.

The Royal Commission into Victoria's Fire Service is only a proposal at this stage as it is a policy position of the Victorian Coalition should they be elected next year. Sadly, if a Royal Commission is the only way we are going to remove the ugly politics that has dominated this sad journey then perhaps it is the only answer. I am sure there will be ongoing discussion about this over the coming year.

"A Royal Commission is the only way you will get key people to speak up without fear or without being gagged" is probably the most telling comment I have heard and is a common view amongst most people I have spoken with.

And I agree - let's get the rubbish off the table; focus now on summer and the work we have to do each day; hold our values; be hopeful that the truth will prevail; and encourage a proper and transparent inquiry, whatever form it takes so that we leave the CFA legacy stronger than we inherited it.

LOW VOLTAGE FUSE REMOVAL

VFBV has again requested the Chief Officer to urgently escalate the priority of addressing the significantly reduced levels of training in Low Voltage Fuse Removal.

Due to the lack of delivery of courses, and skills maintenance training - the numbers of trained personnel has plummeted from approximately 5,000 to an all-time low, with only a handful of members across the state remaining current.

VFBV has been advocating for many years the importance of this training for the safety of members and reducing the risks of electrocution hazards, as well as address the non-standard, outdated and untested equipment prevalent across the State and inadequate stowage of removal sticks on vehicles.

CFA advised VFBV last year that it had completed and submitted a Business Case to Government for funding of a program to replace untested and dated equipment as well as address the urgent need to re-establish skills maintenance and skills acquisition training across the State.

VFBV investigations reveal this request for urgent funding was unsuccessful and has resulted in the project going nowhere. Given recent grants and funding programs provided to CFA, VFBV has requested CFA to again prioritise this work in the latest rounds of funding.

Delegates have requested the Chief Officer escalate the issue and have the matter addressed as a matter of urgency. The Committee continues to try and inform and advocate to CFA on the serious risks both to members, and the organisation the current situation is resulting in.

HAZARDOUS TREE MANAGEMENT

The Chief Officer has advised he expects all CFA members to complete the Hazardous Tree Management course prior to this year's Fire Season. Brigades have been posted an Information Package including posters and a DVD.

Brigade Captains can sign off members who have watched the DVD and successfully completed the quick quiz at the end.

Individual members can also complete the package themselves in their own time, by logging into the Learning Hub on Brigades Online.

The Tree Hazard Online course will appear on the homepage. You can complete the online course and the quiz all in the learning hub, and at the end, your training records will automatically be updated to show you have successfully completed the Hazardous Tree Management course.

HOARDING

People with hoarding behaviour live with a higher risk of starting a fire or being trapped in the event of a home fire. Locations of high clutter and hoarding can also pose a risk to firefighters due to the elevated fuel loads and compromised access and egress risks.

CFA informed the Community Safety committee the "Recognising and Reporting Problematic Residential Clutter" poster was finalised, along with a corresponding Operations Bulletin that will be going out shortly. The poster provides nine images of a typical residential room with increasing levels of clutter. Each image is sequentially numbered one to nine - with images five through to nine representing high levels of clutter that should be reported.

To assist with firefighter safety when responding to these locations - Brigades can now register individual addresses identified

MEDIUM TANKER SURVEY NOW OPEN

The Medium Tanker survey is now open.

An initiative of the Equipment & Infrastructure Committee - the purpose of the survey is to gather feedback from Brigades who have been issued with (or have familiarity with) the 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.

The Committee is keen for feedback from any members who wish to provide their thoughts and experiences of how the Medium Tankers are working in the field.

If you have any feedback or design ideas that you think would benefit future builds - please get involved. The survey can be found on the VFBV website.

as having high hoarding/clutter activity that will create a note in CAD so future crews responding to those locations will be notified en route to the incident as well as appending a notification to the ALERT message.

Brigades can report locations with high levels of clutter on Brigades Online. Go to: Fire & Emergencies > Incident Management > Report High Levels of Clutter. Members of the Community Safety team will review and process the incoming forms and will also ensure privacy is maintained when adding a property to the system.

The poster and Operations bulletin also provide additional information on how to identify and respond to locations with high clutter, including safety advice. Brigades are highly recommended to run awareness sessions to educate members on hoarding.