



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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REPLACEMENT PPC

VFBV has received a small number of reports that volunteers applying for replacement personal protective clothing (PPC) items are being rejected by CFA District offices. State Council received a report this month of a member denied replacement structural boots that were leaking and told there was 'insufficient budget' to replace them.

The brigade was told to fund the replacement themselves. State Council has resolved a zero-tolerance approach to these issues and that any member who has been denied replacement PPC are to log the incident in CFA Safe and approach your local District Council who will then escalate with CFA as a matter of priority. All operational members are entitled to have PPC that is fit for purpose and in good working condition.

When approaching District Council, members are requested to have a record of who has denied the request, and as much date and detail information as possible so that appropriate action can be taken. Any rejected applications for replacement PPC should be requested in writing, and best endeavour used to escalate internally for resolution first. In most cases VFBV officials have been able to resolve the issue quickly and at the local level to the satisfaction of the member involved.

Additional support is being provided to District Councils to ensure these matters are escalated and resolved as quickly as possible, and VFBV will monitor for any recurring trends or trouble spots for immediate escalation to senior CFA management as a matter of priority. Brigade Officers are encouraged to report any instances where members have not been provided appropriate replacement items within reasonable timeframes.

WELFARE FUND

Brigades are reminded that 31st December is the deadline for paying this year's Welfare Fund subscription. Subscribing ensures your members are protected in the likelihood of needing emergency financial assistance if they find themselves in hardship due to loss of work, family illness or accidental injury.

Under the Welfare Fund Rules if a Brigade fails to pay its Welfare Fund subscription and its membership lapses, there will be a one year waiting period imposed should the brigade decide to re-join in the future.

Therefore, it is incredibly important for the protection of your members, that Welfare Fund subscriptions are kept current with payments received by VFBV before 31st December each year. Please contact your Brigade Secretary to ensure your brigade is up to date.

Last financial year a total of \$96,735 in Welfare Fund grants were paid to volunteers in severe financial need across the state, and the support of the Welfare Fund is always gratefully received by brigades, and volunteers in their time of need.

16/17 year old firefighters

State Council has supported a request from District Council #9 to investigate and obtain the views of members on the continued use of 16- and 17-year olds as operational members.

With the law classifying any member under the age of 18 as a child, members are requested to discuss and make submission on whether the minimum age for operational activities should be changed or if there are further steps that can be taken to protect and improve the safety of children participating in CFA activities.

While a formal CFA position is not known at this time, State Council has agreed that this matter is very likely to

SPIRIT OF CFA

A reminder that nominations for the Spirit of CFA are due shortly. The deadline for nominations has been extended to Monday 13th January 2020. This is your chance to nominate those quite achievers.

Our people are humble, and we need your support to tell their story. We are especially interested to hear about quiet achievers who go about their daily work without any thought of being recognised. More information, the criteria for the awards and the process for nomination can be found at cfa.vic.gov.au/spiritofcfa

2020 STATE CHAMPS

Urban Juniors – Horsham, 22 and 23 February

Urban Seniors – Mooroopna, 28 and 29 March

Rural Seniors – Mooroopna, 28 March

Rural Juniors – Mooroopna, 29 March

Entry forms for the State

come up in the future, and therefore it is prudent for brigades and members to be given sufficient opportunity to consult and provide feedback so that VFBV is well informed if and when it does get raised.

Brigades, Groups and members are encouraged to discuss at their local District Council meetings, and all members including juniors, parents, fellow brigade members and leaders are encouraged to consider making submission so that all perspectives can be understood and considered.

Information on how to make a submission can be found on the VFBV website, or by contacting your local State Councillor, VFBV Support Officer or District Council Executive member. Submissions are due by Monday 2nd March 2020.

CFA continues to make a significant contribution to assist the NSW and QLD campaign fires. As at writing, CFA has contributed more than 2,000 cumulative personnel deployments to NSW, the majority being volunteers. This is approaching more than 60% of the total interstate and overseas personnel contributed to the NSW campaign.

And while 1,603,712 hectares have been burnt as at November, the NSW Rural Fire Service reported that it had saved more than 2,600 buildings in the direct area impacted by fires. The number of saved buildings is expected to double once figures from the last two weeks are collated. This is an incredible effort, and our peers and colleagues in NSW should be extremely proud of their work.

Positive feedback has been flowing in from senior NSW officers and brigades of how well the Victorian crews have worked with local units and our interstate peers.

Thank-you and well done to all members who have been deployed and thank-you also to those members who have stayed back and pitched in to support our frontline activities back at home. You should all be very proud of your efforts.

I also want to acknowledge the wonderful work from support members and staff. From our wonderful Peer Support members who have been embedded in task forces to look after our crews mental and personal wellbeing, the DMOs who always keep our fleet humming, and the comms staff who have done an exceptional job at overcoming some technological issues inherent in these kind of deployments. These are just some examples of all our people working together and serving our communities. Never lose sight that CFA is made up of incredible people doing incredible work which really comes to the fore during these kinds of disasters.

Could all members please ensure we are monitoring our

Rural Senior and Junior Championships are due by 28th February 2020, and are available from the VFBV website or VFBV office.

Although entries for the State Urban Junior & Senior Championships were due 1st November 2019, late entries will be accepted – please contact the VFBV office.

VFBV encourages all Brigades and members to

WORKING WITH CHILDREN

All State Championship officials are reminded that they are required to have a valid working with children card on file with VFBV in order to perform any track official role at State Championships. First introduced two years ago, State Council have made it mandatory for any member performing the role of Judge or Track Official to have a valid working with children check card on file that lists VFBV and CFA as organisations.

This includes all members that support track activities such as announcers, recorders, first aid officers, protest registrars and official photographers. Members can register for a card at www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au.

The check generally takes three weeks to be processed, and members need to ensure that VFBV is listed, which you can do by logging in to the online portal at the same website, or by phone on 1300 652 879. Further details are available on the VFBV website or via the VFBV WWCC Frequently Asked Questions circular available from your District Council.

If you are unsure if we have your card on file, you can phone the VFBV office on (03) 9886 1141

INCREDIBLE CONTRIBUTION

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

peers for fatigue and guarding against over commitment. It is in our nature to put others ahead of ourselves. Please look out for each other to ensure our commitments are sustainable and as least disruptive to our families, careers and work/life balance as possible. Forward planning for a long season will be critical, and I encourage brigades and groups to continue this work.

VOLUNTEER STRIKE TEAM LEADERS

Like many of you, I was extremely disappointed to learn of an incident earlier this month involving the standing down of an extremely experienced and respected CFA volunteer strike team leader. He was told that because one of the tankers on the five-tanker strike team contained paid firefighters, that they were following a union directive that required the strike team leader be replaced with a career staff member.

I am heartbroken that such a small number of individuals could even contemplate playing these petty and divisive power games during an active emergency and spoiling what has been an incredibly positive campaign.

VFBV has warned of the dangers of allowing industrial arrangements to reach well outside the normal employment relationship and start interfering with operational matters.

To be clear, the so-called directive being quoted is buried in Schedule 15 of the proposed EBA. VFBV has long argued that clause 35.4 (Work organisation) may also be used to the same effect for level 1 and 2 incidents, and exclude volunteers being recognised as Sector Commanders, Division Commanders and Task Force Commanders etc. Schedule 15 was used to usurp the clear carve out from Level 3 incidents contained in clause 35.4. This

participate - as spectators, team supporters or competitors. There are events for all size teams, from one or two competitors up to eight competitors - and for all ages, genders and abilities.

For Brigades new to competitions needing further information or assistance, please contact your District VFBV Support Officer or the VFBV office.

demonstrates how the interplay of multiple clauses gets used to circumvent so called "protections". Remember the volunteer protection clause '7A' quoted ad nauseam that stated, "the role of volunteers in fighting bushfires.....is not altered by this agreement." Yet again - these protections and promises have proven untrue.

Not only have volunteers been misled, but so have members of Parliament. Consider the following commitments put to volunteers and parliamentarians during the fire service debates. (1) That the proposed terms of the EBA would not impinge on the powers of the Chief Officer. (2) There was no impact on volunteers and in fact there was a clause inserted specifically to ensure volunteers would be protected. (3) That all firefighters respect the fireground and the proposed terms are only about the pay and conditions of employees.

Walking through those commitments, it is clear that: (1) We have just witnessed evidence of a proposed term usurping the Chief Officer's Chain of Command and Standard Operating Procedures. (2) The effect has had a direct impact on volunteers which now bans them from leading composite strike teams. (2b) The so-called volunteer protection clause has had zero effect, and (3) these terms have been used on the fireground during an active emergency to cause maximum disruption and offence.

In all emergency services, but especially in ours - mixing operational doctrine with industrial side deals is a recipe for disaster. Our work is dangerous enough without introducing additional complexities. Terms that lead to conflict or ambiguity should have no place. Segregating people based on their EB status and refusing to work with others is just madness. No other emergency service in Australia tolerates such blatant over reach. Any term that can allow anyone to discriminate against emergency management volunteers or subjugate them is appalling and should be denounced and withdrawn. VFBV stands firmly behind the volunteer and fully supports his qualifications, experience and his merit-based appointment.

The VFBV Board has condemned the incident and is demanding action be taken to ensure it never occurs again. With the upcoming introduction of FRV, we must ensure these kinds of arrangements are not allowed to perpetuate the sidelining or disempowerment of senior volunteer leaders in the future.

Cooperation is the cornerstone of emergency services. The Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission spoke authoritatively on the importance of unambiguous leadership and unity of command and effort. I recall vividly senior operational leaders speaking on the importance of all agencies working cooperatively and as one.

VFBV is raising this issue as a significant safety concern and believes that this incident



is a warning bell to the dangers of allowing industrial matters to continue spilling over and interfering with operational doctrine. We must not abandon the principle of selecting leaders based on merit and experience. This is not just a matter for CFA volunteers, but for all members of Victoria's emergency services. These same clauses that have been used to discriminate against CFA volunteers can also be used to exclude EMV personnel, other partner agencies such as DELWP, VicPol and SES, and even our own PTA staff and employees who frequently report they too are being sidelined simply because they are covered by a different agreement.

REFORM

The VFBV Volunteer Reference Group met last week. We have passed on the frustration and disappointment of members with the lack of communications and engagement regarding reform. We have advised the significant impact on morale this is having. VFBV has requested that engagement with integrated brigades and those brigades immediately surrounding them start as a matter of priority.

We have requested that direct consultation on the development of the allocation statements needs to start as soon as possible so that volunteers have a direct involvement. CFA is required to provide the Minister an allocation statement for each integrated station which will detail assets to be transferred to FRV. These statements are given authority in Part 6 (Transitional Provisions) of the Reform Legislation. We have also requested an appeals process be established to outline concerns should volunteers disagree with elements of the allocation statement before it goes to the Minister for approval. CFA has agreed to commence engagement ASAP and VFBV will continue to monitor.

MERRY XMAS

I know for many of you, the sooner we put aspects of this year behind us the better. VFBV is continuing discussions with the Government on how best volunteers can be supported in the future and how CFA can best be supported to make it the incredible organisation we all know it can be.

My wish for the new year is that next year will bring a new found respect and recognition for the incredible and selfless work you do every day in your communities. Please stay safe on the fireground and may you, your loved ones and all your families enjoy a wonderful Xmas and New Year.