



# VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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## 16/17 year old Operational Firefighters

A reminder that the views of members on the continued use of 16- and 17-year olds as operational members is being sought. 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.

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.

## State Champs under 18s

CFA and VFBV have worked together to implement a new registration process for any competitor under the age of 18 taking part in this year's Horsham or Mooropna State Championships.

CFA will require all parents and guardians of any person under the age of 18 to provide parental consent and supply relevant personal and medical information of their child, utilising the secure online platform CareMonkey.

Parents and Guardians of junior members participating in this year's State Championships should have been sent a link by CFA via email which will take them to the required online form to complete. Simply click on the link, create a profile (if you don't have one already) and fill out the form. FAQs are available on Brigades Online. If you have not received the link please contact CFA via championships@cfa.vic.gov.au

## Replacement PPC

A reminder that State Council has resolved a zero-tolerance approach to any members being refused replacement PPC due to budget constraints or other factors.

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.

Brigade Officers are encouraged to report any instances where members have not been provided appropriate replacement items within reasonable timeframes.

## VOLUNTEER TIME IS PRICELESS

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

The anniversary of February 7 2009 stands as a stark reminder that our fire season still has a way to go yet. Each year we pause and reflect on the 173 precious citizens who were tragically lost during those fires.

The anniversary is a reminder of our collective promises to them and all fellow Victorians that we will do everything we can to ensure our communities are best prepared for future disasters.

In the words of the Bushfires Royal Commission's final report "The lives of many Victorians were changed forever, and many showed they are capable of deeds of great courage and compassion. Although some communities were physically destroyed, their members also displayed ingenuity, strength and resolve in the face of this calamity."

While public and media attention to this year's fires have started to wane, the fact is we still have a lot of fire in the landscape and will for some time. As at writing, Victoria has seven going bushfires, two contained and 48 under control, with a total area burnt so far this season currently more than 1.5 million hectares.

And while we are only potentially halfway through the Fire Season, I want to continue my call for everyone to keep looking out for one another and to ensure our commitments are sustainable. If you are over committed and things are getting on top of you – please talk to someone ASAP.

If you or your Brigade keep getting approached for deployment, unless someone

has said something – the system is likely to just keep tapping you until something is said. One of my priorities following this season will be to speak with State Council about pulling together some interested vols to think about how we can design some more robust human resource availability and utilisation tracking systems.

As many of the current CFA systems are localised they have the potential to be disjointed. As such it is often very easy to keep hitting the same brigades or groups over and over and lose track of how fairly (or not) the load is being shared across our State-wide network of Brigades. For every brigade that has approached me about over utilisation, another has raised the fact that they haven't been asked to provide any resources at all.

If this is happening to you, please don't just suffer in silence. Make contact with your Captain or Group Officer and nudge it up the chain. I have seen some really good planning to try and buddy up Districts so that calls for resources are evenly rotated across Regions, but unless brigades are reporting under or over utilisation issues – some of the micro management issues might be being lost.

And when it comes to people's time – your time - there is no more precious resource, and it must be respected far more than it is now.

Your time is not free, and it is absolutely not worthless. At the risk of sounding like a mastercard advertisement – every second a volunteer is

giving should be treated as if it were priceless. We must ensure line managers and incident management teams respect the time that volunteers are donating to the State – and recognise that many of you are making significant sacrifices in order to deploy.

Sacrifices you make willingly, but none the less your time and sacrifice deserves to be respected and managed well, with full accountabilities and transparency. Volunteer time must be respected and must be managed like the precious resource that it is. And utilisation doesn't stop at activation.

Ensuring volunteer time is being used for best community effect and benefit. Ensuring crews on deployment have meaningful roles that are well planned, communicated and understood by all crews. Ensuring briefings and incident action plans are prepared in advance and delivered to crews on time. Ensuring meals and accommodation are well planned and coordinated. Ensuring travel arrangements are safe and effective and well-coordinated and supported.

These are all important ways to show respect for the incredible volunteer contribution underway.

### BUDDY BRIGADES

I would like to encourage brigades to consider buddying up with a brigade from the fire affected areas. This isn't charity – it's about reminding brigades that we are all in this together, and no matter how tough it gets, we'll look after each other and be there during thick and thin. In fact, the information exchange that occurs through buddy brigades from different Districts or Regions can be incredibly rewarding for each.

The concept of buddy brigades has been around for a while and mirrors the concept of cities or towns linking up to create 'brother/sister' cities or 'twin towns.' This concept was made popular following the second World War and back then was intended to foster friendship and understanding among different cultures and between former foes to build peace.

In the CFA context it is about brigades linking up with brigades from different areas and fostering some friendship and linkages that extends far beyond traditional connections like group or district. The more diverse the brigade differences the better. Each brigade learns from the other, and you'd be surprised how alike and how different all at the same time each of our brigades can be.

In the current context, it is about partnering with a brigade that may have been heavily impacted by this season's fires, with a brigade that hasn't. Brigades can then form a special relationship between them.

What this looks like is completely up to you.

Some run joint training that gives brigades the opportunity to travel and catch up with people from different Districts. Others arrange working bees or exchanges of



members for small 'holidays' away from home. Some are able to arrange fundraising opportunities that allows a more resource rich brigade to help a smaller more isolated one.

And smaller brigades can share their unique community connections or local produce/crafts with perhaps more metropolitan brigades that perhaps don't have those very personal connections that are inherent in smaller and more isolated brigades.

The point is for each brigade to provide something unique that allows each to learn from the other. They are equals and are partners. They are sharing their experience and their community with the other. Maybe it's only once or twice a year – but it's the connection that matters.

If you have an interest, discuss it over with your Captain. Captains - pick up the phone and have a chat with a local Group Officer or District Council from a fire affected area and see what you can find. The more organic the matching process is - the better.

But if you run into a complete brick wall, phone the VFBV office or drop us an email at vfbv@vfbv.com.au and we'll do our best to help you out.

Be creative but also please respect that some brigades are still under very high operational workloads and might just want some space to get through the current season.

### MEMBER RECOVERY & WELFARE

VFBV Support Officers and District Councils in the fire affected areas are working to identify any CFA volunteers who have lost their homes, stock, fencing, outbuildings, machinery or anything else that will impact on that members livelihood.

Connecting members up with grants and recovery services is a priority as well as topping up or providing additional grants to bridge any gaps from our welfare fund or our volunteer support and recovery trust. If you have been impacted, or you know someone who has been, please get in touch with your local VFBV Support Officer or District Council as soon as possible so we can assist you immediately.

Stay safe and keep your heads up. Rest when you can, and look out for one another. You are all doing incredible work and we are all so incredibly proud of you all and the amazing role and contribution you are making to your communities

## WORKWEAR TENDER DELAY

VFBV was advised by CFA last year that the tender for the new volunteer workwear was finally due to go to market just prior to Christmas. We have now been advised that this did not occur, and work is underway to release it shortly. We are obviously disappointed with another delay but will keep members apprised of progress and continue to encourage progress.

In other news, CFA has advised that prototypes are due to be completed by the end of this month that will enable them to be displayed at future meetings and events.

## Reform Update

VFBV issued a News Note Update #3 on the 4th February. This update includes important information on current status of the Governments Fire Services Reform and current areas we are seeking feedback and comment on to help inform VFBV views.

VFBV is also seeking feedback and validation on updated FRV Boundary maps that have been sent to affected brigades. The boundaries should match the current CFA assignment areas of each of CFA's current integrated brigades. If your Brigade borders a CFA Integrated Brigade and therefore is likely to be impacted by the new FRV boundary, Brigade Captains or Secretaries can contact Mark Dryden (m.dryden@vfbv.com.au) for a copy of the proposed map if you haven't received it. CFA has advised that it has provided maps to all affected brigades.

Our News Note update is available from the VFBV website, or follow the link provided on the cover page of the VFBV Quarterly Supplement that is included with this month's Fire Wise.

## 2020 State Championships calendar

Urban Juniors – Horsham, 22 & 23 February  
 Urban Seniors – Mooropna, 28 & 29 March  
 Rural Seniors – Mooropna, 28 March  
 Rural Juniors – Mooropna, 29 March

## SPIRIT OF CFA

Due to the high level of operational activity the deadline for nominations has again been extended to Sunday 1st March 2020. With some of the incredible stories coming from this year's fire season, this is a terrific opportunity to recognise those people you think make an incredible contribution to CFA.

More information, the criteria for the awards and the process for nomination can be found at cfa.vic.gov.au/spiritofcfa

## Asbestos reminder

VFBV has come across instances where members' PPC, suspected of being contaminated with asbestos, is still being delayed for laundering.

Brigades are reminded that following strong and sustained VFBV advocacy back in 2017, that CFA changed its laundering processes to a more streamlined process that ensures faster turnaround times. Members should refer to Operations Bulletin 004/2017 for details. In essence, all PPC suspected of being contaminated by asbestos should be bagged and tagged correctly as detailed in this bulletin, and then sent immediately to CFA's new structural PPC laundering contractor (IDS) to be decontaminated and laundered in one process.

There is no need to delay sending PPC until analytical test results confirm the presence of asbestos or not. Each District has its own contractual arrangement to safely courier the gear to the laundry (as TOLL cannot be used for suspected asbestos) and this should be activated through the RDO.

A reminder that Bushfire PPC is not microchipped, so members should ensure their name is on each item of clothing sent for laundry to assist with the matchup process at the end.