



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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Training restrictions easing

Many would be aware that COVID-19 has forced CFA into restricting many activities resulting in training acquisition courses being postponed or cancelled throughout 2020.

It has been positive to learn that following public easing of restrictions, CFA skills acquisition courses can now start with CFA confirming that skills acquisition can go ahead throughout the summer period providing that there is maintained capacity and the training can be done in a Covid Safe manner.

VFBV welcomes this news and will monitor the situation as we understand that many Brigades are finding that restrictions have created a backlog and the difficulty in being able to upskill members over recent months, especially in vital training such as Breathing Apparatus.

VFBV can also confirm that CFA's position is that skills acquisition training can continue throughout the Fire Danger Periods with CFA committing to ensuring that Instructors will be made available anywhere in the State when and where required.

STATE CHAMPIONSHIP REGISTRATION

A reminder of the deadline of 1st February 2021 for pre-registration for all attending any of the State Championships being conducted at Mooropna in March.

This particularly applies to any Brigade team wanting to enter to compete and Brigade members wishing to nominate as a Track Official or Judge. Pre registration must be completed prior to 1st February.

Due to requirements for a COVID Safe event, the entry and registration process has changed for all 2021 State Championships as an online process through the Operoo platform, and all attending/competing/officiating etc at any Championship event at Mooropna, are required to preregister online at <https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-operoo>

Competing Brigades, please note the Brigade member who is completing the Brigade's team entry form, must complete and have processed their own Individual Registration first, following which they will be forwarded the relevant entry forms and information. Members completing Brigade entries will need to allow sufficient time for their own pre-registration to be processed before the entry form will be sent to them.

Likewise all members wanting to nominate as a Track Official or Judge need to complete their Individual Registration first, at which time they will be prompted to complete the relevant nomination form ensuring that VFBV know which role/position you are nominating for to ensure you are included on the relevant roster/s.

Rescue, EMR support

VFBV delegates to the Equipment & Infrastructure Committee have strongly supported the call by volunteer rescue brigades from across the state who have been requesting CFA increase its budget to allow for much needed equipment upgrades and specialist response capability.

In welcome news, Committee members were recently informed of some new equipment expected to be rolled out soon. Brigades will see an upgraded battery-operated lighting kit as a part of an aspirational target to remove 240 volt power equipment from appliances to improve safety. The new lighting and other specialist equipment will help to ensure operators have a safer experience when attending rescues. New vehicle designs are progressing as well as continued trials of state-of-

the-art equipment.

VFBV encourage all volunteers to access and complete the annual VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey. This survey is a critical feedback loop and assists us to understand the areas that volunteers want us to advocate for. The results of the survey are public and are presented in detail to Government, EMV and CFA.

The survey will be closing within days. Please visit <https://www.vfbv.com.au/cfa> to complete the survey today.

Last chance

With the anniversary of last year's Black Summer fires in mind, I wish to reflect on the

work of VFBV and our delegates who have worked tirelessly with Brigades and members across the State but in particular the North East and South East of Victoria to support volunteers directly impacted by the 2019/20 Black Summer fires.

The VFBV Volunteer Support and Recovery Trust has been working alongside delegates and each of the VFBV District Councils over the last year to provide support and relief grants to those most heavily impacted and requiring additional support. As I said last year, we know from first hand experience that the journey back takes time, patience and understanding and we are committed to supporting our people for as long as it takes.

Immediately following the fires our Trust, in partnership with the VFBV Welfare Fund, provided over \$133,000 in emergency grants to support CFA volunteers whose primary residence were destroyed by the fires. These grants help supported these members re-establish their homes or relocate should the memory of their loss be too great.

Over the proceeding months, VFBV worked with Captains and Group Officers to identify and reach out to others impacted. This process was made much harder by the proceeding COVID lockdown and restrictions, but we determinedly pushed through and ensured these processes continued despite the COVID challenges.

Similar to the work we conducted following the Black Saturday fires, members were supported through two main special grant initiatives. High Impact Support grants were provided to support volunteers with repairs to their damaged residences, out-buildings, machinery and help members recover from significant livestock, feed or fencing losses.

And smaller general Support and Relief grants were provided to support volunteers with minor repairs or to help replace tools, equipment, pasture and smaller stretches of fencing.

And while this work continues, as at last month the VFBV Volunteer Support & Recovery Trust has paid out more than \$255,500 in grants, on top of the \$133,000 provided in emergency primary residence relief grants representing close to \$400k in direct support to CFA volunteers arising from last season's bushfires.

The Trust has now distributed over \$1.1 million dollars since it was established just over 10 years ago following the Black Saturday bushfires. This is an incredible achievement and one members and delegates should be

Black summer recovery progress

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Welcome to a new year, and good riddance to the one just gone. I don't think very many of us will look back on 2020 with much fondness.

And while the start of 2021 has bought back some familiar COVID-19 challenges - let's hope the year ahead heralds the start of a rollout of an effective vaccine and the return to a relative 'normal'.

Speaking of normal, I am relieved to observe a milder season than last year, which has certainly minimised fire activity so far. Thank-you to each and every one of you who have given up time with family, loved ones and friends during the Xmas and New Year break to respond to fires and incidents across your local communities.

And while many have been unable to travel due to border controls, it is a timely reminder that should you be planning to travel locally, you are encouraged to remember those towns that were heavily impacted by last season's bushfires.

Please consider continuing to support these communities with your hard-earned tourist dollars should you be travelling within Victoria over the coming months. Supporting local businesses in these communities is a wonderful way to support their recovery and help them get back on their feet. And like those communities impacted by the Black Saturday fires of 2009, for many of these communities the road to recovery will take many, many years.

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Prototype Pumper Tanker

Members will be pleased to learn that the Prototype Pumper Tanker is close to being completed. COVID 19 restrictions have limited visibility to the build, and resulted in working party members being unable to visit the workshops as it is being built.

In welcome news earlier in December with the easing of COVID restrictions the VFBV delegates to the working party were able to view the near completed appliance at the manufacturers workshop twice before the Christmas break. The interest in this type of appliance from across the state has been positive with many requests being made for brigades and groups to be included in the statewide tour.

For those who are specification driven the Prototype has a 3000 litre water tank, 2500lt per minute hydraulic pump, tank autofill function, luminous handrails for better visibility at night, new control screens and the addition of a TIC mounted in the front bull bar as well as a full suite of battery operated rescue equipment.

CFA has agreed to working party members request to assess the appliance in its operational capabilities through a series of practical tests before it is sent on the statewide tour to brigades and groups to view.

Once finalised locations will be communicated to all districts and it is hoped that as many volunteers as possible can attend a location close to their brigade and give constructive feedback.

the-art equipment.

VFBV has also supported the concerns raised by rescue brigade members who have reported that the directive to discontinue the use of winches has had an impact on the ability of rescue brigades to undertake some critical specialist work. CFA has been asked to provide an outcome that will allow the use of winches to be used safely. While there has been no outcome to date, delegates will continue to pursue.

EMR upgrades are also progressing for volunteer EMR brigades with new and improved defibrillators equipped with single pad technology, WiFi and Bluetooth data transfer built into the unit. Special training defibs, intelligent training mannequins and the creation of a state training cache for defibs and mannequins are progressing well.

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immensely proud.

And as with our Welfare Fund, we have maintained our legacy of ensuring 100% of the money we receive through donations to our charities remains in the trust and is used entirely for grants to volunteers. VFBV covers all the administration and expenses ensuring every dollar received by us is put to good use.

It goes without saying that the work of our Trust would not have been possible without the wonderful and generous support of our donors which also reached new levels during last season's bushfires. The outpouring of support from the general public, international donors and corporate donors especially, was unprecedented. Thank-you also to those Brigades and individuals who made donations.

I wish to acknowledge the Barlow Foundation in particular. The Barlow Foundation was founded by Beverley Barlow and established in 2014. And while Beverley passed away suddenly in 2017, she left a legacy and an inspiration that carries on through her multi-generational family today as demonstrated by the foundations generous donation last year following the fires to our VFBV Volunteer Support and Recovery Trust.

On behalf of all members I wish to provide our sincerest gratitude to the Barlow Foundations support of our work. In particular I want to thank the Chair and CEO Debra Barlow and the whole team for their unwavering support for us and for CFA volunteers over the past year.

No volunteer ever expects to be impacted by the very same fires they have routinely defended their communities against, which is what makes the work of our Trust so incredibly important when dealing with the fallout of large campaign fires that impact our own.

The VFBV Welfare Fund also notched up an important milestone in recent months, surpassing over \$2 Million dollars paid out in welfare fund grants since its inception in 1918. Last year alone the Welfare Fund recorded the highest demand ever for welfare fund grants, disbursing close to \$300k in emergency grants during 2020 to support CFA volunteers in significant necessitous circumstances. The welfare fund has not experienced anything like that kind of demand since the 2009/2010 period following Black Saturday.

And while we go out of our way to work quietly in the background and without fanfare to be cognisant of our members dignity and privacy, it is important to share these achievements and work so that members can not only share in these positive stories but also have confidence that VFBV continues to have your back and works tirelessly to support you.

Thank-you to all of our delegates that serve as either Trustees or members of the respective Committees of Management for our charities. The work you do to selflessly support our members is



incredibly important and much appreciated, and I want to acknowledge the exceptionally high workload that this has bought over the past year.

And while no one ever wants these kinds of events to occur, I have often remarked that the very worst times that mother nature wreaks on us also brings out the very best in human kind. The compassion, empathy and dedication that not just Australians showed over the last 12 months to those impacted by last summers bushfires, but also people from across the world. It is not only humbling, but truly inspirational.

So, it is in this spirit that we approach 2021, as we focus on the now and continue to pursue the hopes, dreams and aspirations of all CFA brigades, groups and volunteers.

1000TH EDITION!

And last but by no means least, I wish to congratulate Fire Wise on its 1,000th edition.

Fire Wise (formerly 'The Fireman') has been a trusted and respected source to fire-fighters across Victoria for more than 70 years. Uniquely, this independent publication has always prioritised giving brigades, members and fire-fighters an opportunity to contribute to it and make comments on a wide range of issues of the day.

Fire Wise/The Fireman archives provide a unique and fascinating snapshot of CFA, its brigades, and its people over the course of our history.

Gordon Rippon-King, the managing editor of Fire Wise is in fact the third generation of the King family, after founder and first editor Norman Tosh (Captain of the Warracknabeal Fire Brigade) sold the publication to Gordon's grandfather Les King in 1953.

Les was the editor for 20 years, followed by Alan King who took over in the 1970's who was then followed by the present editor Gordon King in 2001.

Gordon, thank-you for your tireless efforts and dedication in providing a trusted, independent and at times sole source of important information for the benefit of CFA, the associations and CFA volunteers.

Fire Wise is a reassuring constant to thousands of us across the sector. It's been like a dependable and trustworthy friend and has been there through all the good times and the not so good.

Here's hoping for many more pages and the many more stories yet to be told.