



# VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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## COVID-19 PORTAL

CFA has reported that the Pandemic Team continue to work towards a 'roadmap to normal' as brigades continue to train and meet under more relaxed protocols as part of the transition to COVID-normal.

It is important that as brigades begin to return to more traditional service delivery and brigade routine that they continue to wear masks indoors, regularly sanitise hands and adhere to social distancing rules.

With the recent outbreak of COVID-19 cases in NSW and recently here in Victoria it only highlights that no-one can be complacent when it comes to infection control.

Members are asked to be extremely vigilant in ensuring the correct COVID protocols are adhered to at all times. The CFA coronavirus online portal will continue to be updated as the situation changes.

Recent articles highlighted the magnificent work done by brigades to continue to service their communities during what has been very challenging times.

The COVID Portal is available from: <https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/Show?pageId=covid19>

## CFA ANNOUNCES NEW LOOK WORKWEAR

VFBV has welcomed CFA's announcement of progress on CFA workwear that was provided on the 20th January.

A total of \$3 million in part funding for workwear was secured from the Victorian Government back in August 2017.

After many years of delays and external interference, VFBV has been campaigning hard to see this project delivered. The working party has worked in good faith with CFA during that period, providing input and ensuring volunteer feedback was constantly incorporated into CFA's final designs.

In excess of 5,825 individual responses to surveys and requests for feedback have been considered by the working party demonstrating the interest and complexity in the design process.

Given the broad and diverse, and sometimes polar opposite aspects of some of the feedback - this has been a challenging process, but also demonstrates the commitment to incorporate feedback.

And while CFA did not accept all of the working party's recommendations, we are pleased that the final design represents a smart and professional look and honours the majority of feedback received from the thousands of volunteers who con-

## GROUND OBSERVERS FOR THE FUTURE

VFBV is continuing its advocacy through the Joint VFBV/CFA Operations Committee on behalf of volunteers concerned there may not be sufficient volunteer Ground Observers for future fire seasons.

VFBV has highlighted the lack of pre-requisite training being provided and the lack of support to build this capability over recent years.

CFA has confirmed the volunteer capacity in the state's ground based Intelligence

tributed to the discussions.

We are also appreciative of the CFA officers who assisted with this process and supported the working party with technical knowledge.

VFBV is continuing to advocate for additional funding to provide a more fair and equitable allocation across the State and we are seeking greater flexibility for brigade and group initial allocations to provide an opportunity for brigade/group management teams to have input into their respective allocations, as well as the ability for top-up orders.

Public tenders are currently underway, and we look forward to workwear rolling out later this year.

## Structural Helmet safe storage

The Joint Equipment & Infrastructure Committee has discussed the roll out of the new structural helmets which are nearing completion after experiencing many delays due to the covid restrictions across the State.

During this time CFA Engineering continued to work on options for the safe stowage of the new structural helmets in appliances. Members would understand that this is a complicated process due to the many variants in CFA's fleet of Tankers, Pumpers and specialist vehicles.

Priority is being given to the fitment of helmet stowage to appliances at Brigades that already have the Pacific F15 helmet. Helmet stowage for the remaining appliances is intended to be modified in parallel or ahead of the remaining roll out of helmets.

Some Brigades have been involved in testing brackets and bags and providing feedback to CFA for improvements. Consideration has prioritised passenger safety, accessibility, compliance with OH&S regulations and vehicle limitations.

The fleet of pumpers were fitted first with the light pumpers now being considered and a prototype bracket being designed for testing before final fitment is completed.

gathering (GIP) role has diminished over time.

Reports indicate that 229 ground observers have gone across to FRV with only 50 volunteer ground observers still remaining within CFA.

Discussions on a ground based intelligence gathering plan are being discussed between CFA and Forest Fire Management Victoria.

The plan is considering an interoperable enhanced training package for sector commanders/division commanders to ensure personnel have the experience and course

## Tapping into our pioneering spirit

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Thank-you to all members who participated in our most recent annual VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey.

The survey officially closed last month, and with well over 2,500 CFA volunteers participating, and over 5,500 fire service volunteers Australia wide - the survey remains one of the highest and most reliable samples of volunteer emergency service opinion and satisfaction metrics in the country.

And while analysis has only just commenced - sadly - early results indicate a continued decline in CFA volunteer satisfaction across several key areas.

The worst two performing areas contributing the most to volunteer dissatisfaction are again volunteer consultation (or the lack thereof) and training.

One of the early take-aways from the initial analysis is to consider that at the time of the survey, fire services reform implementation was about halfway through its first year and there had been significant promotion of a renewed focus by CFA leadership on the importance of volunteer engagement and consultation. And while this work may have only just started and therefore you would not expect it to significantly affect this year's results, I would urge decision makers to reflect on the absence of any apparent 'placebo' affect whatsoever.

As expected, "reform" and the new arrangements have

most certainly not provided a silver bullet, magic pudding or any discernible 'honeymoon' period thus far.

This confirms our experience that volunteers are tuning out the rhetoric and are looking for real and tangible outcomes that are proof of change, not just promises of change.

In many people's minds - deeds and actions are worth more than all the words in the land. That's not to say we shouldn't keep trying but this should act as a sobering reminder that the road to change will be measured by the mile, not the inch and there are rarely any shortcuts.

Anyone who has been involved in change management would have come across the mantra espoused by management consultants inc. who love to sell the allure of 'low hanging fruit'. The theory being that a quick SWOT analysis of any problem will normally reveal some quick wins that promises quick and easy gains for very little effort while you work on the longer-term changes.

As I remarked to an earlier CFA CEO some time ago now - you can forget that snake oil. Previous leadership picked the low hanging fruit years ago, and the orchard is now bare. You'll be lucky to find a branch let alone some fruit. There is no low hanging fruit left. Nadda, zero, zilch. Grab a ladder, roll up your sleeves and be prepared to work hard for next seasons harvest team.

Now speaking of hard work, I want to publicly acknowledge the efforts of new Chief Officer Jason Heffernan who has certainly hit the ground running.

Jason has bought a renewed passion, perspective and enthusiasm to the Chiefs office, with a healthy dose of active questioning about "why do we do it this way?" Similarly, he has prioritised talking and engaging with volunteers in the field and hearing from us firsthand about the volunteer experience of CFA but equally important - listening to volunteers hopes, dreams and aspirations. His regional tours of brigades across the State continues, and from all reports - he is leaving a great first impression.

Volunteers have embraced his unapologetic support for the volunteer ethos and his strong advocacy for volunteer empowerment, trust and respect. He is equally assertive in recognising the vital role that CFA plays in communities right across Victoria.

I have been very pleased to observe the Chief referring collectively to 'our' CFA, quickly graduating from interstate visitor to stalwart defender and protector of one of Victoria's most precious resources. Thank-you Chief, well done - and keep up the good work.

But equally - we as volunteers must also embrace the change journey if we have any hope of influencing it. As volunteers we are equally responsible for the organisa-

tion's leadership and destiny. And for those fatigued by the change journey, the bitterness and many a false start, I would ask we reflect on the proud history of volunteers being the instigators and pioneers of constant positive change and evolution of our fire service over the years. For in many ways - volunteers are in fact leading the charge in demanding change to the organisation through their feedback. If the way things are done now is causing such widespread dissatisfaction - as it clearly is - then we must commit ourselves to a change journey of fixing it and getting behind that change.

We also must acknowledge that this is going to come very hard to those that have suffered what feels like endless change that has delivered very little tangible outcomes. Change for changes sake is no real change at all. And thought bubbles from on high will not cut it. Embracing volunteers, doing change with them instead of to them - and being respectful of the nuances required to cater to a volunteer-based organization and work force is critical. As is patience, empathy and some good old fashion decency in how people should be treated, embraced and included in discussions about what those changes should be.

Like an elastic band, CFA culture will resist any change that grass root members do not get behind and commit to. The politics of division that have played out of late should also be viewed as the aberration it is. The mantra of divide and conquer has no place in our organisation and is unworthy of the public good and service provided by CFA members and something we should play no part in.

So, the challenge for all of us is not to close ourselves off to all change but rather find a way to assess the potential pros and cons of proposed changes and then decide to either get behind it or not. We shouldn't be afraid of driving our own change also. I know you are tired, and many of you tell me you are 'over it'. But let us be the change we want to see. Let's not resist for resistance sake, but by the same token, if we are not behind a proposed change or see a better way - we owe it to ourselves to speak out and contribute to the discussion.

There was a contribution from Fireman Sam in the October 2009 edition of The Fireman (Fire Wise) (no 862.) The article was titled 'Cousin Fred's Letter.'

Keeping in mind that CFA was still very raw after the events of Black Saturday back then, it is instructive of the kind of getting back to basics thinking that should form the genesis of any future CFA improvements. The article should be required reading for anyone in CFA that is contemplating change.

In it, Cousin Fred opines that volunteering is likely to be perceived by the next generation of volunteers as a mugs game. A couple of excerpts:

"However friendly and welcoming the local brigade may be - and I think they are gen-



erally warmly so - the recruit is confronted by an obstacle course of bureaucratic requirements and impediments. She or he joined for many and varied reasons, but they include learning a set of skills and applying them - preferably usefully and to somebody's benefit."

"They soon discover that most of a brigade's business is rapid-fire exchange of paperwork with HQ, agonised head scratching about the actual meaning of directives from on high and means of complying with them but seldom any hint of why it should be so."

"If they joined with any hope of making a difference, they soon realise that, for much of the time and in most of their CFA activities, they are small, insignificant cogs in some complex machine that works in a manner even more mysterious than that of the Almighty to perform wonders that are a public laughing matter and the butt of widespread derision."

Cousin Fred then leaves little to the imagination in his assessment of management and CFA corporate and signs off as "not-very-cheerfully, Cousin Fred."

The point of this is not to agonise over the organisation's collective shortfalls but to reiterate and reinforce the blunt and sobering advice given to Cousin Fred. The gist was - don't just write about it Fred - do something!

It is in this spirit that I want to thank every single person who has recently contributed and/or taken part in surveys, workshops, VFBV district council meeting discussions or made submissions to recent topics open for formal consultation. You have made a difference and your voice is not only being heard but is helping to shape the future.

For those who have not participated or taken part, please consider getting involved. The strength of CFA is the collective experience and wisdom that comes from within our volunteer ranks, and we have never needed you as much as we do now.

To quote Thomas J. Watson who served as Chair and CEO of IBM between 1914 - 1956 and who oversaw the company's growth during the early computer revolution - "Once an organisation loses its spirit of pioneering and rests on its early work, its progress stops."

We have much to be proud - but we can't just stand still and opine for the 'good ole days'. Please - stay connected, stay involved and help us continue to influence what comes next.