



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

Address: 9/24 Lakeside Drive, Burwood East, 3151
 Email: vfbv@vfbv.com.au
 Telephone: 9886 1141
 Chief Executive Officer: Adam Barnett

Post: PO Box 453, Mt Waverley, 3149
 Website: www.vfbv.com.au
 Fax: 9886 1618
 State President: Nev Jones AFSM



Open for consultation

CFA has commenced consultation on a number of important documents including the new CFA Behavioural Standards; a new Child Safety Behavioural Statement; amendments to the Child Safety and Protection Business Rule; and an updated SOP on Driver Fatigue and Record Keeping.

The Fire District Review Panel has also commenced consultation on their proposed risk assessment methodology by way of a discussion paper.

VFBV is seeking broad feedback and comment from volunteers in order to inform and assist with VFBV formal responses to these documents. VFBV District Councils have also been invited to lead local discussion at the District level.

Copies of relevant documents and timelines are all available via your local District Council or our website vfbv.com.au

Nominations

Nominations for the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) for the 2022 Queen's Birthday honours list are now open.

The award recognises those whose service is above and beyond the normal zealous and faithful discharge of normal or ordinary service, either in the short or long term. While volunteers are often modest and reluctant to seek out recognition for their exceptional contributions protecting lives and property, nominating a fellow volunteer to recognise their contribution is a way to say 'thank you' to those people who have stepped up and helped to inspire other volunteers.

A helpful guide to preparing nominations is available from the VFBV and CFA websites. Nominations need to be submitted to CFA by 1 November 2021.

JOINT COMMITTEE EOI

Expressions of interest are now open for volunteers to nominate as subject matter experts to the VFBV/CFA Joint Committee's for the 2022 calendar year.

If you feel you can contribute and have the time, are passionate about one of the seven streams and want to be an integral part of our Joint Committee process – then please talk to your local VFBV State Councillor or VFBV Support Officer for a nomination form. Nominations are due to your District Council early November 2021.

OUR COMMUNITY OUR CFA

Members are encouraged to visit the VFBV website to view the 'Our Community Our CFA' video that celebrates Victoria's iconic CFA, one of the largest, most diverse and most professional emergency services in the world. The video demonstrates the skilled, professional and diverse range of skills and value that CFA volunteers selflessly make to the safety of all Victorians 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

MORE FOR ONLINE SUBSCRIBERS

Want to receive this information direct to your email? You can register for VFBV's e-newsletter via www.vfbv.com.au and clicking on the VFBV Newsletter Box.

Our Facebook page is at www.facebook.com/cfavol and you can follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/vfbv or on Instagram @volunteer_fire_brigades_vic

Many of you would now be aware that last week the Premier announced that all authorised workers must now be vaccinated to continue working onsite. CFA volunteers are included as authorised workers.

The announcement indicates that in order for authorised workers to attend their work location, or in our case this is presumed to mean a CFA location or fireground - you will need to have your first dose by 15 October, and your second dose by the 26 November.

Worryingly – one third of the way through the first deadline we still do not have access to any further information or clarity.

The Chief Health Officer's orders are not available yet, and we therefore are not in a position to provide any clarity or answer any questions on the logistical side of what this means such as; how it will be implemented; if it will be recorded and by whom; where the onus will lie; and what adjustments are being made to cater for emergency service personnel and their unique working environment.

Our priority continues to be to seek clarity around the directions to assist members understand the implications and options, including what brigades may or may not need to do.

Based on anecdotal observations, we believe that the overwhelming majority of CFA volunteers support vaccination and have been steadily pursuing their jobs

Pre-register for survey

This year's VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey is about to open. Volunteers can pre-register now to ensure you are amongst the first to be notified of this year's survey.

Visit the VFBV website or use the QR code contained in last month's quarterly supplement.

CULTURE, RESPECT AND VACCINES

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

for some time now. It was certainly our belief that education, support and encouragement were being very effective at reaching vaccine targets inside CFA in preparation for this year's fire danger period.

The lack of notice and compressed timeline for mandatory vaccination is certainly presenting its challenges and is confronting for some. Especially for those members who do not have convenient access to a vaccine hub, the ability to get time off from their employer or other pressures unrelated to their emergency service volunteering.

Even if we assume CFA is tracking well above the Victorian public in first and second dose targets, this still leaves a considerable amount of people to try and get through an already stressed and under pressure system in less than two weeks' time.

We have been requesting clarity on what additional support is being offered to help emergency service personnel access vaccines, and especially volunteer members who have the added complication of the agency they volunteer with not being their employer and therefore not able to support them with time off, or other entitlements and arrangements that a paid workforce routinely have access to.

We are also advocating for additional support, such as mobile hubs and the like especially for remote and regional locations.

Our main focus is on ensuring that we still have sufficient capability left within the emergency management sector to continue dealing with the already increased tempo in operational response as we move into the fire danger period.

And while VFBV strongly encourages vaccination and believes the expert medical advice that the vaccines are safe and effective - as a representative body we also have an obligation to support all members, including those that consider themselves unsure or unwilling to access vaccination.

For these members, we will continue exploring and considering options on how you can best be safely supported during the pandemic. Your service and experience are still very much respected, and we would urge you to not simply resign or walk away.

While we are still awaiting the actual Chief Health Officer orders, our early advice based on previous directions is that mandatory vaccination will not be a condition of membership, but rather a condition of being able to attend a CFA location, incident or

fireground. And while this will substantially limit your involvement and contribution for the immediate fire season, we don't know how long these arrangements will be for, if they are just transitory or how long the State of Emergency may last.

We respect all members right to be informed and urge members to seek expert medical advice should you be undecided or unwilling.

For those that are vaccinated, thank-you.

Union Campaign

Unsurprising, there have been many enquiries from members concerned at the firefighter union's most recent media campaign that started a couple of weeks ago.

Concerns raised with VFBV include; the false insinuation that CFA brigades provide a less service than their FRV counterparts; the misappropriation of the agency brand to try and trick the community into thinking it is an official agency campaign; undermining community safety messaging that Victorian's must plan for their own safety; attempting to influence an independent panel formed by the government's own fire service reforms apparently designed to take politicisation out of boundary reviews and the terrible perpetuation of gender and diversity stereotypes that the fire services are collectively trying so hard to address. Where do you start?

We work in a sector that is built on teamwork, professionalism and respect for the skills that each emergency agency and individual member brings to the incident. We rely on each other and depend on the mutual respect we have for each other to get the job done.

For any member of the emergency management fraternity to carry on and thumb their nose towards any other agency, partner or individual is just so incredibly disappointing. And this follows the unprovoked attacks on our fellow SES volunteers just a couple of months ago. To risk relationships, morale and the reputation of our entire sector just to pursue your own industrial agenda and belligerent expansion is incredibly selfish.

At a time when our fellow frontline health workers are doing everything they can to manage our health system, police have the unenviable task of enforcement, paramedics are heroically dealing with a health system pushed to its limits and nurses are tirelessly working double and triple shifts to cover unprecedented demand - it really is just so distasteful to even contemplate that someone thinks it's ok to prance around with a self-serving 'look at moi' campaign in the midst of an ongoing health emergency.

VFBV will always stand up for our volunteers and will always defend you from those that wish to denigrate or insult the selfless work you do. But by the same token, we are not going to make this a race to the bottom.

To mount some kind of public attack response in

reaction only gives the campaign credibility and sends the message that this kind of behaviour is acceptable across the emergency management sector. It isn't. And we are not going to be a part of any such campaign or tactics that attempts to denigrate our fellow emergency service personnel or agencies.

We will pursue Government and agencies for a public campaign to provide confidence to communities in their volunteer fire services, and we will do so honestly and respectfully without feeling the need to criticise others.

For the record, VFBV respects every other emergency service agency that we work with and alongside. We respect each individual that works within our sector, and we respect and are proud of our career firefighters and our partner fire services and agencies - Fire Rescue Victoria and Forest Fire Management Victoria.

The best thing you can each do is treat the campaign with the contempt it deserves and just ignore it.

As far as I'm concerned, it's an own goal and reflects poorly on anyone who wants to defend or minimise the offence taken by it.

To my fellow volunteers, please don't let this campaign impact your friendships and respectful relationships with your local career firefighters. We have received just as many calls of concern from them as we have from volunteers. The union wants you to be mistrusting of each other, they mine that cynicism and sow those seeds of fear to try and portray us at each other's throats to rally their troops to whatever the latest campaign is.

The public has never questioned your professionalism, and the best way you can prove it is to hold your heads high, keep performing the incredible work you are already doing and continue to model what it really means to be a true professional within our emergency management sector. We strive to be inclusive, respectful and diverse. Professionalism describes a person's conduct, skill, competence, values and qualities. The existence of a pay cheque simply proves you are paid - not whether you are professional or not.

Culture Review

VFBV has welcomed the announcement by CFA of the commissioning of Dr Szoke to help lead a review into how to further strengthen CFA's systems and approaches to ensure CFA becomes the exemplar of healthy, safe and respectful workplaces across the fire sector.

We are fully supportive of this review, and the concept has been the subject of much discussion for some time now. As you would be aware through previous comms, the VFBV Board and State Council have both been advocating very strongly in trying to resolve the VEOHRC impasse and improve and strengthen CFA process regarding complaint management, and ensuring all our workplaces are safe and



respectful.

Dr Helen Szoke AO is the former Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner. Dr Szoke will bring unparalleled credibility and expertise to the role. Most recently Dr Szoke has completed an independent review on behalf of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, where she considered measures to prevent sexual harassment, improve reporting and improve support for those who experience sexual harassment in Victoria Courts and VCAT.

And, just like our courts, CFA Volunteers likewise expect their workplaces and fire stations across the sector to provide safe and welcoming environments that live up to the exceptionally high and professional standards displayed and modelled by CFA members every day in protecting their communities from fire and other emergencies.

This review will give CFA a solid baseline and framework to strengthen and support the vital goal of promoting diversity and ensuring all our members feel safe and have access to robust systems of accountability. A fire service where victims are supported, and all members are encouraged to speak up about the importance of a safe and respectful workplace.

I want to acknowledge the disappointment and hurt by all those members who feel let down and abandoned by the previous VEOHRC process. And while VFBV has staunchly advocated for VEOHRC to be involved and be asked to complete the work they started, we acknowledge that CFA cannot continue to be held hostage to a process that has seemingly lost Government and VEOHRC support and has been relentlessly bogged down in legal and political fights.

As reports into Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria, the Australian Defence Forces and the Victorian Public Sector have shown, these are complex and confronting topics to tackle. But by doing so, we set the example and raise the bar for all others to follow. VFBV accepts its leadership role to support this work and be part of that change.

We will be supporting Dr Szoke and any members who wish to contribute to her work. We will shortly be meeting with the review team and will keep members informed on how you can contribute to the review. Take care and stay tuned.