



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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VFBV is now seeking applications from any CFA volunteer interested in applying for any of the volunteer nominated positions on the CFA Board.

Please see page 3 of this edi-

CFA BOARD

tion of Fire Wise for further details. Applications close 1st February.

LAST CHANCE SURVEY

This year's VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey is closing soon. Scan the QR code to complete the survey today.



2022 champs

Entries are now open for the 2022 State Championships which will be held on consecutive weekends in March 2022 at Mooropna. All team entries and judge and official registrations will close Sunday 20th February.

The Urban Junior State Championship will be held on the weekend of Saturday 19th and Sunday 20th March with the Rural Senior and Junior and Urban Senior Championships on the following weekend Saturday 26th and Sunday 27th March.

Similar to the 2021 State Championships, all entries and registrations will again be collected online, please visit the VFBV Website for links to enter your team or register as a judge or official for any of the Championships.

Updated Rule Books are also available from the VFBV Website for both the Urban and Rural Competitions along with a list of local competitions being conducted in 2022. The local competitions

Feedback requested

Working with Children (Adverse Notice) Procedure: CFA has released a revised procedure to deal with adverse notices. The revised procedure responds to previous VFBV feedback where we requested stronger privacy, robust procedural fairness including review and greater consistency. Feedback is due 14th Feb 2022.

EMV Operating Model Review: Feedback is sought from senior volunteers with experience operating at Level 2 and 3 incident management. Feedback is due 17th January 2022.

are also printed on page 12 of this edition of Fire Wise.

Any Brigade or member needing assistance with the Team of Judge and Official registration process, please contact the VFBV office 9886 1141 or championships@vfbv.com.au or CFA at championships@cfa.vic.gov.au

POSITION VACANT

VFBV is seeking to appoint a VFBV Support Officer to work in regional Victoria with VFBV District Councils, Brigades and volunteers to facilitate consultation, issues resolution and volunteer engagement.

The position is a state role, with emphasis and focus on providing support throughout CFA's North West Region (Districts 2, 14, 18 and 20.)

This is an existing position, with the incumbent due to depart shortly.

In addition to relevant skills and experience, candidates will need to understand CFA and volunteerism, be good listeners; be able to facilitate good consultation; ability to establish productive networks; navigate through complex issues resolution; be self-starters and have a passion to improve arrangements that benefit the welfare and effi-

ciency of CFA volunteers.

Extensive regional Victorian work travel is envisaged, and flexible work base locations will be considered for the position, with the priority focus to assign a work location within the CFA North-west region.

Flexible working arrangements, to cater for extensive evening and weekend work, will be tailored to match the

HAVE YOU HAD YOUR SAY?

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Welcome to 2022!

With temperatures exceeding 40 degrees in many parts of the State as we welcomed in the new year, it is a timely reminder for members to practice heat safety.

Just last month, Risk Frontiers published its latest research on fatalities caused by natural hazards in Australia. The latest research expanded on their previous work analysing heatwave fatalities between 1844 to 2010, where it was determined that heatwaves were second only to disease epidemics in lives lost from natural hazards. The latest research looks in depth at the period between July 2000 to June 2018 and finds that half of all heatwave fatalities occurred in Victoria, and a quarter in South Australia.

While many of us carry the tragic losses of the 2009 Black Saturday fires in our memories (173 fatalities) it is far less recalled that health authorities attributed 374 fatalities to the southeast Australia heatwave between 25 th Jan – 9th Feb, 2009.

Similarly, the defining Black Friday fires of 1939 that led to the formation of CFA recorded 71 deaths, but the preceding heatwave led to 438.

Which begs the question, why isn't more being done to build public education and awareness on the importance of having an extreme-heat plan to compliment other emergency plans like fire and storm? With the prediction of increased frequency of heatwaves, it is more important than ever to incorporate these conversations into our usual pre-summer community education. And while extreme heat emergencies fall more within the health sector than fire, many of the messages are complementary and fit well together in our pursuit of community resilience and safety.

Closer to home, the importance of managing heat related stress remains critical to firefighter safety. Members are urged to be proactively hydrating at work or home prior to attending a call-out, and crew leaders and strike team leaders are reminded to monitor crews and ensure fluids and task rotation are being managed on the fireground. Operations bulletins recommend 15-20 minutes work

needs of our volunteer membership base. This is a full-time position.

Prior to applying you should familiarise yourself with the Position Description which is available from the VFBV office or website.

Applications close Tuesday 8th February 2022.

requires 20 mins rest in a shaded area during hot days. And lower arm cooling and use of cool wet towels under the arm pits and around the neck are all very effective methods to return cool blood to the core of the body during rest breaks.

The very late signs of dehydration include the onset of headache, dizziness, nausea, cramps and dry skin. If left untreated, dehydration can very quickly progress to heat stroke, so please don't wait until you are thirsty to drink water, and don't forget that water alone will not be enough to rehydrate you from fluids lost from sweat. During active workload, firefighters can lose more than a litre of water per hour, so it is critical that sufficient water and electrolyte fluids are available to your crews.

OPERATING MODEL REVIEW

As the year finished up, I had the most unpleasant task of requesting volunteer feedback on EMV's draft operating model review with a ridiculously short feedback deadline. Despite being published on the 17 November, the draft operating model review was provided four days before Christmas, with EMV requesting feedback by mid-January.

To say I was disappointed would be an understatement. To provide this timeline over the Christmas/New Year period during our busiest time of year is frankly disgraceful.

The lack of volunteer consultation throughout the review became very evident upon reading the draft. Rather than focus on the task of supporting and building emergency management capability across Class 1 and Class 2 agencies across the whole EM sector, the review seems to narrowly focus on building capacity by using largely Victorian public sector employees and recommending 'permanent' IMT's. As one senior volunteer remarked to me after they read it - 'it seems like they started with a recommendation then wrote the report to support the outcome.'

And whilst the VPS benefits from tangible targets and recommendations for business cases, the section purportedly addressing volunteer barriers and lack of support, training and accreditation for the sectors overwhelming volunteer workforce is simply backed up by what I can only describe as dismissive comments, motherhood statements and touchy-feely sentiments. Incredibly disappointing.

And while I could go on and on (and on) about the

review's shortcomings, and its lack of credibility given the poor consultation process - I will await further volunteer feedback. For those who have already responded - thank-you. For those that requested we communicate your anger at the poor process and ridiculous timelines, rest assured we will strongly communicate your frustrations.

If you are a senior volunteer with IMT experience operating at the Level 2 and 3 incident levels, and are interested in reviewing the report and providing written feedback to help inform VFBV's position, please contact your District Council or Mark Dryden on m.dryden@vfbv.com.au

VOL SURVEY

A reminder that the most important annual survey that directly impacts and influences future priorities for CFA volunteers is underway and will close shortly.

The VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency survey is the largest survey of its kind in Victoria and connects grass root volunteers directly to decision makers to influence funding, priorities and initiatives aimed at improving CFA.

The survey opened on the 24th November, and will be open for around 12 weeks to provide plenty of opportunity for volunteers to participate.

I have yet to meet a volunteer who does not have an opinion on how well or how poor things are going within the fire services.

Yet, when I attend brigades and groups to discuss particular issues of concern, I am often asked about why certain projects or initiatives are underway, with people asking whose crazy idea said system/process or project was. Yet when I then ask how many of those present actually completed this year's survey, it is clear how these ideas get up. As I point out - priorities and budgets are heavily influenced by those that do provide feedback, and how else do they expect VFBV to influence these conversations if they are not contributing to the data and our influence on a regular basis.

A quote attributed to President Harry Truman following his win in the 1948 American election was "decisions are made by those who show up." And while this was particularly poignant for a country that does not have mandatory voting, I would argue it is equally important for an opt-in survey such as ours that was designed by volunteers for volunteers and has established itself as one of the most reliable measures of CFA volunteer sentiment and opinion we have.

A much less flattering sentiment to Truman's could be 'some show up and make the decisions, and some don't show up and complain about the decisions being made.' And while I think this is an over simplistic analogy, it certainly does serve to highlight the importance of getting involved.

The survey asks for your opinion on most aspects of your CFA experience. From training, consultation, people



management, support from and cooperation across CFA, culture, how well volunteers are respected and how you feel about the future.

We take your privacy seriously with all your answers being confidential, and we never share your personal details with anyone including CFA. All results are deidentified, yet every comment and every response is analysed to understand what is working well and what isn't.

Results and themes from last year's survey have been instrumental in discussions onboarding the new CFA leaders including the CEO, Chief and members of the executive. For example, the cooperation themed questions provide feedback on engagement between volunteers and CFA by requesting information on whether volunteers feel they have been given adequate opportunity to provide input and feedback into decisions that affect them.

In recent results - volunteers indicated that they often get 'direction' from CFA and decisions are often made without consultation which diminishes the recognition of the skills and knowledge of senior and experienced volunteers. There was a strong feeling that even when consultation opportunities are presented or invited, decisions have already been made and it is just lip service. These are important perspectives that help us to work with CFA on improving things.

In the comments provided by respondents last year, many made some reference to the divide, even referred to as a chasm in some instances, between some paid staff and volunteers. A familiar thread to the comments was that they felt in some cases they were set up to fail. A common theme was that volunteers and brigades were often criticised for things they were not given adequate support for, sometimes by the very people employed to support them.

And while I truly believe that CFA is full of highly dedicated, experienced and passionate people both paid and unpaid, this feedback helps provide a barometer on how well people are walking the walk and talking the talk and allows us to zero in on areas where certain trends are emerging.

So please, if you haven't yet done this year's survey head over to www.vfbv.com.au/cfa and do it today. We want to hear from you. The only way you can help us influence the CFA of tomorrow, is by doing something about it today. Stay safe.

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