



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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SURVEY CLOSING SOON

This year's VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey is closing soon.

Scan the QR code to complete the survey today.



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.

2022 CHAMPS

Entries are 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 on Sunday 20th February 2022.

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.

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

Intermediate bushfire behaviour

CFA has implemented a VFBV recommendation to conduct pilot courses in parallel with the consultation process in Intermediate Bushfire Behaviour (IBB) which VFBV has been actively pursuing for sometime to ensure volunteers have every opportunity to grow their knowledge and transition to level 2 and above IMT positions including Ground Observing/Field Intelligence and Sector Commander.

Intermediate Bushfire Behaviour is a pre-requisite for the above examples. IBB was updated in collaboration with EMV a number of years ago but was never formally released for use nor was it actively promoted as being available, sitting idle until

AFSM honours

Included in the 2022 Australia Day Honours list was three CFA volunteers who were awarded the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) in recognition of their contribution to the community.

John Clarke AFSM (Hilldene Fire Brigade) has been a dedicated CFA volunteer since 1965. His award recognises John for his dedication to improving the safety of the community from fires and other emergencies as well as his outstanding leadership qualities and management abilities, including his contributions during the 2009 Black Saturday fires.

Gill Metz AFSM (Riddells Creek Fire Brigade) has been a CFA member since 2000 and has held the roles of Lieutenant, Training Coordinator, Secretary and Group delegate. Gill has been committed to ensuring that volunteer response capabilities are recognised, measured and integrated into future planning and as an advocate for increased youth involvement and increased diversity within CFA.

Graeme Higgs AFSM (Drouin West Fire Brigade) has been a dedicated CFA volunteer for close to 50 years. Graeme has served in leadership roles for most of his time at CFA, including 20 years as Captain of Drouin West Brigade, junior leader and is currently a Deputy Group Officer of the Baw Baw Group.

This year's honours also included two Fire Rescue Victoria firefighters Brad Quinn AFSM and Wayne Rigg AFSM. Wayne would be known to many CFA members, first joining CFA as a volunteer with the Eildon Fire brigade, before joining as a career firefighter and rising through the ranks to become CFA's State Aircraft Unit Officer where he has made a significant contribution to the sectors aviation response.

VFBV congratulates all these members for their outstanding contribution.

recent discussions bought the issue to light.

As part of the IBB progression, VFBV is also continuing to actively pursue Ground Observing courses with a similar consultative pilot courses accepted by CFA to be held. We will keep you updated.

DON'T BE A DRIP! TAKE A SIP!

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Well, what an interesting fire season this is shaping up to be. While we often joke about the four seasons in a day when describing Melbourne weather, this would actually be a very fitting description of the fire season so far.

And while there is still plenty of season left before we call it, predictions of a milder and wetter season have certainly been accurate, with the usual run of spike days sprinkled in for good measure. Despite heavy rain in some areas, there are still large parts of the State that are bone dry and require our vigilance. Recent fires along the Victorian/South Australian border and throughout the western districts are a good example of how quickly things can turn.

Thank you to all members who have done an exceptional job and gone from dealing with fire on one day, only to then swing into supporting storm and flood emergencies on the next. Lightning has been a particular aggravator this season and will likely continue over the next little while. The agility, professionalism and duty displayed by all responding members has been outstanding as usual.

And while I touched on heat safety messages and the importance of hydration in last month's column, a recent small spike of heat-related incidents from recent fires urges me to repeat it.

Please remember to hydrate, hydrate, hydrate. Drinking when you're thirsty is too late. Thirst is your body's alarm bell that you are approaching serious dehydration. And even then, it can take 45 minutes for your body to rehydrate from the fluids you take to quench that thirst. More serious dehydration can lead to heat stroke or sending your body into shock and land you in hospital where best case scenario is you're looking at a minimum of 24 hours of intravenous fluids.

It sounds like such a simple message that we often feel embarrassed to have to say it, but it is one of those basics that can be easily overlooked when we get so busy. And while the extra humidity is throwing us all for a bit of a loop with the extra perspiration, it can't hurt to keep the message on full rotation.

Could I please request crew leaders and senior vols continue to spruik the message at every opportunity. There may very well be a member whose life you save from this very simple reminder.

COVID-SAFE

Thank-you also to members for the very disciplined approach crews are continuing to take with COVID safe practices on the fire ground. We have continued our outstanding record of keeping COVID exposures to an absolute minimum.

This is not only critical to keep our brigades online but protects our service delivery and vital volunteer surge capacity.

This hard work and diligence are paying off, with exposures acquired through

CFA activities remaining relatively low. This demonstrates the professionalism of all CFA members and the efficacy of high compliance with the COVID-Safe basics of physical distancing, sanitising and ensuring masks are worn on those occasions that physical distance cannot be maintained. (Such as in the fire truck.)

VFBV continues to work hard with stakeholders to ensure members are supported through the pandemic, with the VFBV Welfare Fund continuing to catch anyone falling through the cracks and needing some extra assistance.

After long advocacy, the ability to request targeted additional vaccine hubs for areas that have been having difficulty accessing booster shots is finally a reality. If you have been having difficulty making a booking due to limited opportunities in your area, please ensure this gets raised with your Captain or Group Officer so it can be raised with your ACFO. Deputy Chief Officer's now have the ability to submit requests for additional hubs from health for areas experiencing shortages, and where local demand indicates a need. So, ensuring this information is fed through your chain of command remains critical in making sure we match resources with demand.

I am also pleased to report that CFA's Service Delivery Reporting Centre is now fully available to assist members update their CFA vaccine records. The dedicated staff that support brigades entering their fire reports 7 days a week have now been upskilled to support vaccine recording as part of business as usual.

While previously the vaccine hotline only operated during business hours with limited staff, with the extra training and commitment from the SDRC staff, members may now phone the SDRC on (03) 9262 8663 anytime between 9am and 9pm - seven days a week to update their vaccination status.

While it is still preferred that members update their own status via the website, for those who can't access Brigades online or are having difficulty, the phone option is a terrific way to provide an extra option for people who need a little more help and support to update their status.

And with the extra capacity now online, you will likely get straight through. So, if you've been put off by some delays in the past and have given up -

give it another go. It's easy and simple and should only take a minute or two.

And finally, VFBV is continuing to push for the increased provision of rapid antigen tests for all emergency service workers, to assist members who are exposed to COVID positive cases through their emergency response roles.

VFBV has been very critical of the approach taken by the sector to date that has seen CFA (and other emergency service partners) not receive any priority allocation of RATs from Government held supplies.

Instead, CFA and other agencies have been at the mercy of their own individual procurement processes on the open market, which has been extremely challenging given limited supplies across the private sector.

VFBV has sought the support and assistance of the Minister for Emergency Services and continues to advocate for greater Government support and assistance to help provide members with appropriate options to minimise isolation and other considerations that stem from COVID exposures experienced by volunteer emergency responders that impact themselves, their families, their employers and their businesses.

VALE

Our thoughts and prayers are with the family, friends and loved ones of South Australian CFS volunteer firefighter Louise Hincks.

Louise was fighting a blaze near Lucindale (in South Australia's southeast) on the 21st January 2022 when she was hit by a falling, burning branch, as she and her crew battled the blaze, causing fatal injuries.

Louise was a devoted mother of two and joined the CFS in 1994. A member of the CFS Happy Valley Brigade, she was also a qualified psychologist in her everyday role which she used over the years to help dozens of her fellow CFS volunteers.

Louise was much loved and embodied the virtues and spirit of all volunteer firefighters, signing up to her local CFS brigade (Eden Hills) as a teenager and selflessly serving her community for almost 30 years with distinction - always looking to help others.

She will be sorely missed, and her tragic loss is felt across the entire firefighting family. VFBV on behalf of all Victorian firefighters extends its deepest sympathies to Louise's family, brigade, peers



and loved ones.

A fellow volunteer working with Louise was also seriously injured at the same time, and is expected to make a full recovery. We wish him a speedy recovery and also pay tribute to all responding crews, including CFA members, who assisted with cross border operations to bring the blaze under control.

WELFARE & EFFICIENCY SURVEY

Thank-you to all members who have completed the VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey. There has been a terrific response so far.

The survey is now in its final weeks, so if you haven't yet had a chance to do the survey, please visit www.vfbv.com.au/cfa to do it now.

The survey is a critical way to link grass roots members with decision makers and ensure that volunteers influence current and future priorities. It only takes about 10 minutes, and is central to keeping us informed about what is working and what isn't.

It's ok to feel cynical from time to time about how long some things take to change. We all feel this way at times, but the important thing is to never give up.

I am constantly inspired by the passion and enthusiasm of our volunteers, and the selfless dedication and duty they display on a daily basis to keep their communities safe. It's this passion that motivates us to never give up and always keep trying.

Participating in the annual survey is one small way we can all help the cause and ensure that volunteer views and feedback are at the top of the agenda.

To round out this month's theme, I'll leave you with a quote about water that intertwines perfectly with our commitment to volunteer advocacy:

"A river cuts through a rock not because of its power, but because of its persistence."

Stay safe (and don't forget to hydrate!)

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