



# VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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## Affiliation prize winners

Congratulations to the winners of the 2022/23 VFBV Affiliation Prize Draw!

Thanks to all Brigades/Groups who paid their 2022/23 affiliations prior to 31st July this year thus qualifying for the 2022/23 VFBV Affiliation Prize Draw. The winners along with their selected prizes are:

1st prize - Toolern Vale Fire Brigade (District 14) - G-Force Nozzle with Quick connect coupling; Gated Wye with Stortz Inlet and quick connect outlets; 2nd prize - Tungamah Group (District 22) - five helmet torches and carry case; 3rd prize - Dartmoor Fire Brigade (District 4) - Root Soaker & Bag; 4th prize - Stratford Fire Brigade (District 10) - TFT Break Apart Nozzle.

Thank-you to GAAM Emergency Products and Powdersafe for donating these great prizes.

Remember, by affiliating you are making a vital contribution to the important work we do on behalf of all CFA volunteers. Advocacy, support and the provision of trusted and credible advice are all strengthened when members work together and share a unity of purpose.

If you are not sure whether your Brigade or Group's VFBV Welfare Fund subscription are up to date, please contact your Secretary urgently, as we encourage all those who have not yet affiliated to do so as soon as possible.

For any enquiries, contact your VFBV Support Officer, State Councillor or call us at the office on 03 9886 1141.

## FISKVILLE REDRESS SCHEME

VFBV has welcomed the announcement by the Victorian Government of the establishment of a Fiskville Redress Scheme to support Fiskville affected persons.

The scheme opened on Monday 5th September 2022, and addresses a key recommendation from the 2016 Parliamentary Enquiry into Fiskville which recommended that the Victorian Government establish a dedicated redress scheme offering a range of options such as access to health services, a financial payment and a meaningful apology.

In the same way that firefighting is an inherently dangerous activity, the exposure to toxins released during combustion and sometimes the

agents used to extinguish fires also pose a large risk to firefighters. The historic Fiskville experience demonstrates that these toxic exposures can be present in hot fire training scenarios in just the same way as random fire events.

The scheme is accepting applications from people who had prolonged exposure to toxic substances at the former Fiskville Training College site between 1971 and 2015.

The scheme offers a range of options including a financial payment, and access to mental health counselling and medical health support. You can contact the schemes support team for a confidential discussion or assistance with your application:

## FIRE BEHAVIOUR INDEX

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

September not only heralds the end of winter, but this year marks the official commencement of the new Australian Fire Danger Rating System that officially launched on 1 September nationwide.

Following extensive community consultation and research, public feedback indicated that the old system was difficult to comprehend, had too many levels, and that insufficient numbers of people act on the advice provided. Consistent community feedback indicated common misconceptions, including the false perception that fire danger ratings were designed to predict the likelihood of a fire, rather than describe what the likely fire behaviour would be for the predicted conditions.

Throw in the fact that different jurisdictions used different ratings and inconsistent wording, it was no wonder the feedback confirmed that people were having trouble knowing what to do and how to interpret the old ratings.

The new system was developed to address these weaknesses and was designed to be easier to understand, uses fewer levels, intuitive colours, action-oriented messages and

1300 315 198 Between 9:00 am-4:30 pm, Monday-Friday (excluding public holidays) or via [fiskville.info@justice.vic.gov.au](mailto:fiskville.info@justice.vic.gov.au)

The scheme is administered by the Department of Justice and Community Safety and is independent of CFA. To download an application form, or review further information, you can visit <https://www.vic.gov.au/redress-fiskville>

more simplified terms and language that it is hoped will increase the likelihood of people acting on fire danger rating information.

And being a national program, the new system is being implemented across every State and Territory bringing long overdue nationally consistent public facing messaging and rating thresholds.

While we have been served well by the McArthur meter developed by A. G. McArthur and the CSIRO, more recent fire seasons over the last decade began to reveal fires were more frequently experienced beyond the scale the system was designed for. The 2009 Black Saturday fires were a case in point and led to the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission recommending a revision of the fire danger ratings system. A short-term fix of adding 'catastrophic' or 'code red' to the scale was an attempt to adjust for the extreme conditions at the higher end of the scale.

The new system seeks to utilise the latest science, knowledge and data to improve the predictions of fire behaviour and predict the relevant threats more accurately. Whereas the McArthur system calculations were based mostly on fire weather and relied on two fuel indices (forest and grass) the new system takes inputs across 22 different fuel types that will then calculate eight broad fire behaviour models and indices which better reflect our diverse vegetation and ecosystems and can be applied to the relevant area.

Behind the scenes, we will use the fire behaviour numerical index scales to support planning and preparedness level related decisions, while for public facing communications, the calculated index will be translated to a Fire Danger Rating via one of the four simple categories to convey to the public a simple rating that communicates the expected level of danger should a vegetation fire start, along with corresponding actions they should take to ensure their personal safety. (There is also a 'no rating' level.)

And while there is a high level of confidence that the new system will be easier to comprehend and lead to better community engagement, each of us have a very important role to play in helping educate our communities.

Knowing what the ratings are is one thing – educating our communities on how to use the ratings to adapt their behaviours is something else altogether. This will require significant and concerted effort, and the linkages that volunteer brigades enjoy

within their communities can be leveraged to help drive this behavioural change.

The first step is to ensure each member is familiar with the new system and how it works. This is not only important for your own knowledge, but to assist you should you get a question from the public. It can also help you explain the changes to your friends and family. Online training programs are available now via the CFA learning system that members can undertake immediately. There are currently two courses to choose from, and the introductory course which is made up of two modules is recommended for all members and will take approximately 60 minutes to complete.

The second course is an intermediate course designed to provide a more detailed explanation and is designed for active planners and decision makers. Completion of the introductory course is a prerequisite for the intermediate course and adds another 60 minutes for those who wish to undertake it.

While both courses are publicly available through various sites, it is recommended you undertake them via the CFA online learning system so that your training and course completion is recorded in your training records. Simply visit [members.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://members.cfa.vic.gov.au) and click on the AFDRS (Australian Fire Danger Rating System) picture on the homepage after you log in. This will provide links to the learning hub where you can access the courses.

From an internal perspective, it is important to note that this year the Chief Officer will be using a combination of the old Fire Danger Index alongside the new rating system (Fire Behaviour Index) to determine operational readiness and total fire ban declarations. This will allow the accuracy of the new system to be tested during the systems introductory stages. And like all new systems, there are sure to be some teething problems as the new systems are bedded in, and we may see a slight increase in TFB's.

Rather than assume these are anomalies, it is equally plausible that with all the new data and inputs that the system now uses to calculate the fire behavioural index, these may represent a more accurate assessment of conditions. Only time will tell.

On the positive side, significant work has been undertaken to run the prototype system in parallel using the last 3 – 4 years of data to fine tune the accuracy of the new system and understand its consequences over seasons just past. This has been invaluable and has allowed the system to be tweaked based on historical records and patterns. So while it is a new system, the national board has a high level of confidence in its implementation.

Sadly, there has been some delays in the procurement of new Fire Danger Rating signs. The replacement of electronic signs is being managed by EMV, with CFA managing the manual roadside signs. Given the large number of



signs across the state, these are being progressively replaced starting in areas likely to have fire danger periods declared first, starting in the Northwest. All signs are expected to be replaced by early December.

If you have any concerns for a sign located in your brigade area, you can check on the estimated timing by checking in with your District staff. All old signs should have been decommissioned – and have a holding sticker placed over the board notifying the public that it is due to be replaced shortly.

Brigades are also requested to ensure that any old publications, brochures or pamphlets showing the old ratings are removed from brigade and community locations. You can order replacement publications from your District Community Engagement Coordinator through your district office.

Also available is the CFA AFDRS Stakeholder kit, which will be especially useful to those brigades who use social media, as the kit includes social media content and key messages to assist with your communications. This kit is also available via the VFBV website.

### VALE

On the 2nd September 2022, I and representatives of the VFBV Board attended the State memorial service held to honour the life of the Honorable Jane Garrett. The service celebrated her life and achievements, and we paid our respects on behalf of all CFA volunteers to a brave and inspiring Minister, who will be sorely missed.

### HER MAJESTY

On the day of going to press, we woke to the sad news that Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II had passed away.

The magnificence of her historic reign as the longest serving monarch was only eclipsed by her enduring lifelong devotion to duty that was an inspiration to all.

Her steadfast duty, service and loyalty to her people over her lifetime was most admirable and are qualities that particularly resonate with CFA volunteers. The personal kindness she extended to Victorians and other Australians during natural disasters will be forever remembered and cherished, as too will the support and respect she has always shown towards emergency services personnel.

This was best embodied by her creation of the National Emergency Medal following the 2009 Victorian Black Saturday fires.

In tradition dating back centuries, and on behalf of all CFA volunteers, I solemnly affirm the Queen is dead, Long live the King.

## Dates for 2023 State Champs confirmed

The dates for next year's CFA/VFBV State Firefighter Championships have now been confirmed.

The 2023 State Championships will again be held over two weekends in Mooropna in District 22, with the Urban Junior events on March 18 and 19 and the Urban Senior, Rural Senior and Junior events on March 25 and 26.

The championships attract a broad range of members and act as the largest annual 'celebration of CFA' and include community events, displays, skills maintenance opportunities and a large CFA corporate attendance.

Competing in championship is now more flexible than ever.

VFBV is encouraging brigades to enter for next year's Championships with particular focus on encouraging brigades who have not competed for some years to put together a team, combine

## TONY'S TREK

On 30 September 2022, Inspector-General for Emergency Management (and Chair of the Emergency Services Foundation) Tony Pearce will start Tony's Trek – a 1440km solo charity walk through Victoria to support new mental health initiatives to benefit our emergency management community.

Covering the area from Melbourne to Mallacoota and

across the Alpine Range to Wodonga before heading back to Melbourne, Tony's Trek aims to raise awareness and support for building collaborative sector-wide mental health initiatives led by the Emergency Services Foundation (ESF).

VFBV encourages brigades and groups to get behind Tony's Trek, and think about how they might be able to assist with fundraising and promoting the initiative as Tony's Trek makes its way across the route.

Posters and promotional material are available to support brigades get behind this important initiative. To find out more, donate or get involved go to [www.esf.com.au/tonys-trek/](http://www.esf.com.au/tonys-trek/)

## AGM

This year's annual general meeting will be held on the afternoon of Sunday 2nd October 2022 following State Council.

In order to comply with health guidelines and contact tracing requirements, any delegates intending to attend this year's AGM are required to register their details with the VFBV office by 30 September.

The office can be reached via (03) 9886 1141 or via email at [vfbv@vfbv.com.au](mailto:vfbv@vfbv.com.au)

a group of brigades for a team or enter into just specific events if they don't want to compete across the whole program.

## MORE FOR ONLINE SUBSCRIBERS

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