

HUME FREEWAY TRUCK FIRE

Summary

Around 11pm one evening in February, a fire broke out in the trailer compartment of a B-double truck on the Hume Freeway. The incident was complex as it required the suppression of three separate fires that all posed different challenges. The Hume Freeway was immediately closed northbound to traffic for several hours, followed by the closure of the southbound lanes when resourcing allowed.

Incident overview

Initially the fire was called in as a trailer fire and then further information was provided that confirmed it was a truck. However, because of the limited information there was still confusion over whether it was a prime mover or B-double that was on fire.

The primary brigade's pumper and tanker were first on scene and they quickly identified there were three fires that were well alight and needed to be addressed:

- An oil fire running down the western side of the road, caused by oil leaking from the B-double.
- The B-double fire itself.
- Grass and scrub fires on either side of the freeway that the truck fire had ignited.

The fire involved motor and hydraulic oil products in a mixture of container sizes from 500ml to 1000-litre IBCs (intermediate bulk containers).

The fire was well alight before the first crews arrived. A total of 23 CFA vehicles attended the scene, including support crews, FRV, SES and Victoria Police. The incident was sectorised into three sectors: northern; water; and BA.

Members initially focused on the oil fire that was running towards the pumper, tanker and people and stationary traffic, as these posed the greatest danger. Water was used to help extinguish the oil fire, though this action initially caused the fire to flare to a significant height before there was any cooling effect. By containing the oil to the dirt areas on the roadside, the table drain created a catchment for the burning oil which was eventually dammed so a foam blanket could be applied to stop the oil constantly reigniting. This reduced the intensity of the fire.

The next focus was to obtain the manifest from the truck to identify what fuel it was carrying. The manifest contained detailed information about the 33,000 litres of the various types of fuel, including oil and turpentine products. Thermal imaging cameras assisted greatly to detect the amount of fuel remaining in the truck. Additional vehicles and a hazmat specialist were called to assist with containing the oil spill after it had been extinguished.

The truck fire and the grass and scrub fires were eventually extinguished by crews.

Towards the end of the night, tree hazard assessments were undertaken in the surrounding bush land with help from SES. Arborists were brought in by VicRoads to commence tree felling. The scene was declared under control at 3.40am.

Challenges faced

• **Access and traffic:** The Hume Freeway is a significant transport route. Due to the nature and location of the fire, many vehicles were stranded on the freeway for the duration of the fire which restricted the space that members could work in. Victoria Police had limited resources on the night and were unable to block off and divert the southbound traffic. This also caused issues for attending brigades that mostly approached from the south, because they had to take a

longer route to reach the incident.

- **Tree hazards:** A qualified member with the assistance of an SES safety officer identified any potential tree hazards. It would have been beneficial to have an additional assessor to assist. VicRoads organised arborists for tree felling but they were reluctant to fell trees unless they were likely to fall on the road. This posed a safety risk to crews blacking out.

• **Fatigue management:** Towards the end of the incident, managing fatigue proved challenging. Further resources were required to assist with blacking out, but members were conscious it was the early hours of the morning and the availability of surrounding brigades after being out all night. The incident did not close out until 2pm the next day and crews were exhausted.

• **Resources:** The bulk foam tanker was requested by the incident controller (IC) and deployed by the FSCC. In addition, an ultra-heavy pumper was also deployed. This wasn't suited to the conditions and not discussed with the team on site. Members were not aware that the ultra-heavy tanker was being deployed and they did not have the opportunity to incorporate it into their planning. Under such difficult circumstances clear communication is important. This enables the IC to incorporate any responding specialist vehicles and equipment into their strategies and tactics or cancel them so they can be available for other jobs.

• **Water supply:** Initially, water supply was an issue. Members operating in the northern sector had to wait for brigade members to travel and get water early in the incident, until trucks could travel to the northern sector. Brigades also had to travel to and from local towns to collect water. Other water sources were considered such as dams, but this was not possible.

What worked well

• **Sectorisation:** This occurred early on and was highly effective given there were three fires to contain.

- **Firefighting tactics:** The way the members tackled the oil fire was highly effective. The use of water to knock the heat out of the fire until foam could be used was successful. Containing the oil in the dirt shoulder also proved to be effective.

• **Use of thermal imaging cameras:** Given the nature of the combustible materials involved, the use of TICs allowed members to quickly identify how much remaining fuel was in the truck and to target hot spots.

• **Atmospheric monitoring:** This provided confidence about the safety of personnel and the public and the ability to get close to the incident without needing BA. The benefits of the environmental monitoring also ensured that the members and vehicles could be staged closer given the conditions (maintaining a smaller incident area) and they could be confident that P2 masks were not required except for any dust hazard requirements.

• **Early resource request and placement:** The requests for additional resources con-

CFA CASE STUDIES . . .

Aviation response in difficult terrain

Summary

Early in 2022, two CFA groups faced two difficult and strenuous firefights in extremely challenging terrain, from which a number of lessons were identified. This short case study focuses specifically on the lessons around aviation response.

Incident overview

In the space of just over two weeks, the groups experienced two challenging fires. The first fire started after a lightning strike and the second fire occurred just 500 metres from the location of the first fire.

When members were notified of each fire, they immediately knew they would be faced with a number of chal-

lenges because of the terrain in the area. 'Stony' does not do justice to describe the challenges of this landscape – rolling hills scattered with stones and lava flows (called barriers) interspersed with trees and old stone fences made from volcanic rock.

The amount of rock and stone in the area made access incredibly challenging and the fences dividing the landscape and lack of tracks made moving around the fireground even more difficult. Members found themselves in a situation of having to wait until the fire reached them and relying on aircraft to undertake suppression activities in the early days of this firefight.

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Lessons identified

There were a number of factors in the aircraft response to this incident that worked well.

• **Air attack supervisor intelligence:** The information provided by the air attack supervisors was a major benefit to ensure members at the control point situated quite a distance from the fire had strong situational awareness and were able to make effective decisions. Members are encouraged to always make use of the air attack supervisors and the information they are able to provide during an incident.

• **Early aircraft response:** The early response of aircraft was vital to the outcome of the fire. Aircraft personnel provided good intelligence and could access areas that crews couldn't, which prevented the fire from spreading too far. Do not hesitate to make requests for aircraft early in an incident response to ensure it can be suppressed as quickly as possible. At times it may not be possible to fulfil every request but putting in early requests will improve the chance.

• **Aircraft tasking:** Aircraft tasking during the second fire was effective as members and aircraft crews had a good understanding about what was possible and how to best work together. Aircraft crews could see where crews couldn't reach and so targeted those areas. Brigades are encouraged to work with aircraft as part of brigade training to ensure members are comfortable tasking aircraft and know how to make effective use of them in their response area.

• **Aircraft capability:** It was vital during these fires that firefighters and the incident controllers understood the endurance capability and capacity of the various aircraft supporting the incident. Well-targeted retardant was essential in the terrain because foam would go underneath the stones. Members were aware of this and ensured appropriate aircraft were deployed. However, members also identified some challenges with the aircraft response, including challenges with not being entirely familiar with certain aircraft, and delays in the response of aircraft due to the approval process.

As early aircraft response is a vital factor in firefighting in difficult terrain, it is important for members to understand the approval processes for aircraft support and consider this when decid-

INTRUSION DURING TRAINING NIGHT

Summary

During Winter in 2022, a CFA brigade held a training night involving about 15 members. During this training a distressed man entered the brigade building through the engine bay doors and approached brigade members.

He was dishevelled, appeared affected by drugs and under stress. The brigade dealt with this by taking precautions as if he was drug-affected, though it is important to acknowledge that often people suffering acute mental illness episodes can appear to be in a similar state to a drug-affected person. After wandering around and taking members' personal property, he eventually left. Members called Victoria Police and the man was found a short time later and transferred to hospital.

Incident overview

During the training night, two vehicles had left the station with members on board. The third vehicle was in the process of leaving and the engine bay doors were open. As they were leaving, they were approached by a man who asked them to call an ambulance. He was dishevelled and appeared to be affected by drugs.

He walked into the turnout room and ran around the station erratically, playing with the valves on the vehicles and taking members' personal property.

The captain of the brigade called Victoria Police and reported the situation. At the time there were four brigade members present. The man then began to behave aggressively, though no members were directly threatened.

After about 15 minutes the man left the station. The remaining crew followed him, so that they could report his location to the police. He stopped nearby and sat under a tree. Victoria Police arrived shortly after and transferred the man to hospital.

It was discovered that he had recently been released from hospital and the police had been looking for him prior to this incident taking place.

FEEDBACK REQUESTED TO CFA POLICY FOR WWCCs

Formal consultation has commenced on amendments proposed by CFA to its policy for Working with Children Clearances (WWCC). The proposed draft policy is available for download from the VFBV website.

For the purposes of consultation, while the majority of roles in CFA do not require a WWCC under the Worker Screening Act, CFA is proposing to require all staff and volunteers to have a valid working with children check even if they are not legally required to. The policy proposes a phased approach, requiring all members of a brigade management team and various other roles to hold a WWCC by June 2024.

The policy then extends this requirement to all group and deputy group officers, as well as all members of a brigade that has members under 18, requiring them to hold a WWCC from June 2025. The final phase requires every volunteer to hold a WWCC from June 2026 as a condition of membership.

VFBV encourages members, brigades and groups to review the proposed draft policy and provide any feedback/suggestions/ amendments including indicating support/non-support for the proposed policy.

All feedback is used to inform and influence formal VFBV positions as well as used to influence CFA positions and thinking during the deliberative process. Feedback is due by Monday 14 August, 2023 and can be provided via emailing to feedback@vfbv.com.au or fax: (03) 9886 1618

decision-making contributed to the protection of members of the public and CFA members and vehicles during this incident. The high level of interoperability between all

agencies contributed to the successful outcome, despite some shortfalls in resources. All crews involved worked tirelessly and should be commended.