



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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2023/24 Affiliation Prize Winners

Thanks to all Brigades and Groups who paid their 2023/24 affiliations prior to 31 July this year and qualified for the early payment prize draw. The winners and their selected prizes are:

1st prize - Baranduda Fire Brigade (District 24) – G-Force Nozzle with Quick connect coupling and Gated Wye with Storz inlet and quick connect outlets;

2nd prize - Woodvale Fire Brigade (District 2) – 5 x Helmet Torches and carry case;

3rd prize - Hurstbridge Fire Brigade (District 14) – TFT Break apart Nozzle

4th prize - Watchupga Fire Brigade (District 18) – Root Soaker and Bag

A big thank you to GAAM Emergency Products and Powder safe for once again 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, research and the provision of trusted and credible advice are all strengthened when volunteers work together and stand united as one.

If you are not sure whether your Brigade or Group's VFBV or Welfare Fund subscriptions 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.

SKILLS WORKSHOP

Following the success of the skills workshop held in January this year, the Urban Competition and Rules Committee are holding another skills workshop prior to the commencement of the 2023/24 competition season.

The workshop will be held on Sunday 15 October at the Bendigo Competition Track at 9.30am. The workshop is open to all current and prospective competitors, coaches, judges and officials.

Throughout the day workshops will be conducted with experienced coaches and competitors covering the use of the tray in B Section Hose & Reel events; rolling on; competitor safety; appliance, Marshall and junior events and different skills required as well as a presentation on CFA's Behavioural Standards.

There will also be mentoring and coaching on how the different judge and official roles including judge in the box, announcers, on track

judging, ladder catching and starting.

If you are interested in attending the skills workshop please RSVP to the VFBV office via championships@vfbv.com.au or (03) 9886 1141 by Monday 9 October.

The Urban Competition and Rules Committee has also released a memo to competing brigades which covers the 2023 team of the year, elevation and relegation, the 2024 state championship dates and a request to applications for the 2023/24 competition season. The memo can be downloaded from the Urban Championships section of the VFBV website.

AGM

This year's AGM will be held on Sunday 8 October, following State Council. Please refer to page 2 of this month's quarterly supplement for details.

Presumptive Legislation

In addition to primary site cervical, ovarian and uterine cancer, VFBV has been pursuing the expansion of the scheme to pick up the remaining six cancers that were added to the Commonwealth's scheme being primary site lung, skin, penile, pancreatic and thyroid cancers and malignant mesothelioma.

VFBV has called on the Victorian Government to align its scheme to ensure Victorian firefighters enjoy the same protections and support as their federal counterparts.

Acknowledging the similarity of exposure to hazards by all firefighters and given how frequently Victorian firefighters assist their interstate colleagues, it is VFBV's desire for the prescribed cancers covered under presumptive legislation to be as uniform as possible across Australia.

VFBV supports any efforts to expand Victoria's presumptive legislation scheme to include these additional cancers.

Similarly, at least three other jurisdictions have added PTSD to their firefighter presumptive legislation schemes in order to acknowledge the routine mental health occupational hazards frequently experienced by first responders. Tasmania added PTSD in 2019, the Northern Territory in 2020, and Queensland added mental injury to their presumptive scheme in 2021.

VFBV is pursuing similar arrangements here in Victoria.

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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

It was theoretical physicist Albert Einstein who said: "Whoever is careless with the truth in small matters cannot be trusted with important matters." The quote is taken from what is thought to be the last unfinished manuscript Einstein wrote in 1955, the year of his death.

In an organisation the size of CFA, a significant portion of information is disseminated verbally and through in person briefings, and is handed down through layers and layers, with each person supposedly repeating what they have been told. Anyone who has played a game of 'pass it on' would be familiar with the concept of each person whispering a phrase down the line, and observing how muddled the phrase becomes by the time it reaches the end of the line.

From a VFBV perspective, you can imagine the types of reports that often come to us that have the potential to be highly inaccurate. For this reason, our process and structures are designed to ensure reports are investigated and confirmed as best we can as they travel up the escalation path on any given issue. We have a commitment to seeking the truth and pursuing procedural fairness that puts us in good stead to sort the wheat from the chaff.

One of the things that often astounds me is when a member is worked up over something that VFBV has apparently done or not done. When I enquire as to why they think that - I am told "so and so" told me. Now when "so and so" is that far removed from VFBV processes and structures that no one would assume they would be even close to an expert on such things, I am often left a little puzzled.

VFBV has worked very hard with CFA to strengthen our consultative processes and ensure that volunteers are provided with the opportunity for genuine consultation on matters that have the potential to impact upon them. Genuine consultation takes time, energy and effort. It is not perfunctory, nor will we ever accept it as tokenistic.

Over recent months I have become aware of an increase of incidence of briefings emanating predominately from the District level that try to divert blame to VFBV for delays on various things. When these claims are brought to me, each of these claims are investigated and I can confidently report the vast majority are straight out porkies.

The remainder are a gross exaggeration or twisting of the facts. Recently, I have had reports variously ranging from helmets, trucks and training courses. All have been completely false and reflect very poorly on those making or repeating the claims.

For example, I have countless examples of where CFA has taken months and months, sometimes years working something up, to then only have it dumped on us at the last minute because when a manager took it to the executive for approval, they were unable to demonstrate any compliance whatsoever with S.6 of the CFA Act which requires VFBV consultation under the volunteer charter.

INTEGRITY AND HONOUR

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Rather than admit their error, every enquiry on these long-awaited projects from this moment on then becomes - "we're waiting for VFBV." Nothing about the 8 or 12 months spent beavering away inside their own little echo chamber, or years of inaction. Just look at the date on some of our SOP's if you are after an example. So I have little tolerance when someone all of a sudden decides something is a priority and then tries to guilt us into rushing our processes after they have sat on the issue for years.

So, when you are told by someone that VFBV is delaying the process, I ask you to please enquire from independent sources when was the item actually referred to VFBV. Also ask to see the project plan that identified consultation milestones and planning.

I am also unsympathetic for ensuring items are out for consultation for long enough to provide volunteers a genuine opportunity to review, think and provide feedback. It takes time to make 1,214 brigades and more than 50,000 members aware of what is being sought. It takes even longer for them to then have their own internal conversations before providing thoughtful feedback and consideration of whatever the issue is. These timelines should be planned well in advance and built into the project brief, not tacked on the end as an after thought.

And I cannot tell you the number of times that VFBV agrees to expedite a consultation request, only to then wait for months and months after we have provided our feedback for CFA to finally approve and release it. If it takes four months to get proper approvals from a dozen or so folk at HQ, why is it so unreasonable for us to take 90 days to try and reach 50,000?

I have been very pleased with the commitment from the new CFA executive to ensuring CFA commits and respects the relationship between CFA and VFBV and ensuring the charter obligations are met. I am somewhat disappointed however by how long this appears to be taking to drip down to the lower levels of the organisation.

And while this should not be breaking news - the provisions under the Act applies to decisions and processes being made at all levels of CFA, including both the District and Region levels. I find it somewhat ironic that District's rarely question the delegations they inherit from sections 28 and 29 of the Act, (powers of the Chief and control of brigades) but somehow think section 6 does not apply to them or should be handled by somebody else.

If I sound a little frustrated, you would be correct, but this is a topic that needs to be aired. I have watched over some time now while our delegates have worked their backsides off, giving up their precious time accommodating expedited requests for consultation that are directly the result of poor planning and

poor stakeholder engagement. We then have to deal with a frustrated membership who feel rushed, and then look cynically on the changes proposed because no rationale or background has been provided to explain why CFA is proposing the change in the first place. As the messenger, we cop a lot of this frustration and anger, yet take it in our stride that it comes with the territory.

To then be mischievously thrown under the bus by uninformed District briefings is nothing short of a travesty. I hope name and shame will not be required, but I will continue to monitor closely and adjust our comms as appropriate. I will simply not accept the reputation of VFBV nor our hardworking delegates being besmirched by inaccurate and false narratives. And while I normally give people the benefit of the doubt, there have been too many instances recently to just be a coincidence. My message to those giving briefings is if you are going to blame VFBV for your poor process or decision, you better have your facts squared up. We take our responsibilities seriously, and it is incredibly unfair to the tens of thousands of volunteers that rely on us to hold decision makers accountable to their charter obligations. On their behalf we will continue to advocate for robust and informed consultation and not some mickey mouse tick box exercise.

I acknowledge that by and large the majority of Regional and District personnel are people of integrity, and many are working constructively with VFBV to solve issues of concern. However, I urge all senior leaders to ensure we don't have any outliers in our ranks that are simply ruining it for everyone else. Trust is hard fought and easily lost.

Presumptive Legislation

As communicated previously, parliament is considering proposals to expand Victoria's firefighter presumptive legislation for cancer. Victoria has now fallen behind other States and Territories. Currently Victorian firefighters are protected by presumption for 12 cancers, with the Commonwealth Government now recognising 20. Tasmania will be the first State to recognise 21, and Western Australia and the ACT have already moved to align with the Commonwealth.

VFBV is encouraging all political parties to support the expansion of Victoria's presumptive scheme.

While the Victorian Government has committed to supporting the addition of the three female reproductive cancers, it has not committed to the remaining ones. As at writing, the Greens is the only party to have confirmed its support for the full expansion of the scheme and has introduced a private members Bill, as well as proposing amendments to the Government's recent Bill to have the additional cancers added.

Acknowledging the frequency of members interacting with MPs at brigade functions and ceremonies, we



encourage every volunteer to ask their MP whether they support the expansion of Victoria's firefighter presumptive legislation. We are also seeking the support of all government, opposition and minor party MPs, and request you ask your local pollie for their position on Victoria's presumptive legislation.

I attended our national body, the Council of Australian Volunteer Fire Associations (CAVFA) in recent weeks, and am pleased to report that each State and Territory association has committed to pursuing harmonised cancer coverage for each respective scheme. We will continue working together to ensure all volunteer firefighters are equally protected.

Vale

It was with great sadness that we farewelled our dear friend and life member, Ex-Captain Bob Horner AFMS with a beautiful memorial held on 16 August.

Bob was a member of Sas-safras-Ferny Creek Brigade for almost 70 years, serving as a State Councillor for almost 19. During his time as a State Councillor he served as VRFBA President for one year, Vice President for two, and Treasurer for three. He also served a number of years as the Association representative to the Australian Assembly of Volunteer Fire Brigade Associations, including as an office bearer. Bob was particularly passionate about equal opportunity and occupational health and safety and tirelessly served on committees dealing with those matters.

On 25 August we farewelled ex-Captain Greg Godkin who we lost in the line of duty on 8 August upon his immediate return from a fire investigation he had conducted. Greg was a member of Donald Brigade for almost 60 years, and served as Captain, Group Officer and was a VFBV delegate.

As Greg passed away in the line of duty, his name will be added to the Firefighter Memorial wall and recognised at the annual memorial service next year.

Each service was deeply moving and a wonderful sendoff to two people who dedicated their whole lives to helping others. To both Bob and Greg's family, friends, loved ones and fellow firefighters, I pass on our deepest condolences on behalf of the Association, and thank them most sincerely for sharing their loved ones with us, in service to their communities and the people of Victoria.

May they rest in peace.