

# Fire Investigation facility a leader

CFA has unveiled its new state of the art and purpose built Fire Investigation Training Facility at the Victorian Emergency Management Training Centre (VEMTC) in Huntly.

The \$3.4 million facility is the first of its kind in Australasia and will enable CFA firefighters and other emergency service personnel to learn how to investigate the origin and cause of fires in a safe and controlled environment.

Chief Officer Jason Heffernan said: "We are committed to providing our firefighters with the best infrastructure, training and support but it's not just emergency service personnel who will benefit from this facility.

"Fires can be started as a result of everyday appliances malfunctioning such as fridges, toasters and battery chargers.

"In this new facility, our fire investigators will be trained to identify if something of that nature has happened which can help us prevent future fire emergencies and continue to protect the safety of Victorians.

"We are also excited to be able to share these new facilities with our multi-agency colleagues across Victoria Police, Forensic Services, Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV), Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), Energy Safe Victoria (ESV) and WorkSafe Victoria."

The facility features four burn rooms which can be staged to replicate what happens when a fire starts within a home, garage or other residential environment.

The rooms are fitted with several technological features that can record the temperature of a fire at different levels within the room as well as a large-screen television that's linked directly to the camera inside each room to observe and record the ignition and development of the fire.

This data can then be used to teach firefighters and fire investigators about fire dynamics and helps them piece together how a fire could have started.

The Fire Investigation Training Facility also has a carport where vehicle fires can be replicated for learning purposes.

"This really does allow firefighters, and particularly our fire investigators, to get a good in-depth knowledge of how fire behaves," says Chief Officer Jason.

The set up means investigators can both see and test how modern products burn.

Structure fires (which includes house fires) and vehicle fires are some of the most common types of incidents that CFA firefighters respond to.

"Technology is always evolving, whether that technology in the building industry, whether that be technologies as far as the batteries we use in toys, televisions or other batteries as a source of power.

"So we constantly have to learn about fire again and again, whenever there is a new release of product or the like, so that we understand how it burns and what it looks like once it has burnt."

Pollution reduction was a major factor in the design.

According to the Chief: "This allows us to burn rooms in a safe environment for our firefighters and fire investigators, in a way that is environmentally friendly.

"We are not creating additional pollution by undertaking our training, which is really good for ensuring future generations to come continue to enjoy the environment."

The official opening was carried out by Police and Emergency Services Minister Jaclyn Symes who said: "We have a lot of fires in Victoria, so having the personnel who are appropriately trained to respond around the State is a really important aspect of our firefighting arsenal.

"With a facility like this we know we will be able to

attract more and more CFA volunteers to do the course to become qualified fire investigators."

Fire investigation helps prevent other fires occurring and can result in product recalls if appliances and equipment are found to be unsafe.

For example, an investigation into a structure fire in 2022 identified that the origin and cause of a fire was an electrical failure of a fridge located in an outdoor kitchen at a residential property.

Details of the make, model and year of manufacture were documented as part of the fire scene examination process and ultimately through working in partnership with external agencies such as Energy Safe Victoria (Electrical) the investigations contributed to the identification of the fire risk, leading to a product safety recall of the fridge.

With a focus on environmental safety and sustainability, the training facility incorporates a \$1.76 million thermal oxidiser to capture and treat the smoke and combustion gases produced from the burns.

The smoke can be quite toxic and so the thermal oxidiser is needed to essentially break down all the chemicals within the smoke.

Effectively just carbon dioxide is then exhausted from the oxidiser.

The Fire Investigation Training Facility is also designed to use a minimal amount of water in the suppression of fires and a wastewater management system is in place to capture and store the used water. It is then collected and taken off-site for treatment.

At the opening of the impressive facility are Deputy Chief Officer Rohan Luke, Fire Investigation Manager Nicole Harvey, Chief Officer Jason Heffernan, Minister for Emergency Services Jaclyn Symes and CFA PAD Supervisor VEMTC, Huntly Campus, Frank Beukelman.

# Fire season drawn to a close

by CFA Acting Chief Officer Garry Cook

Following a summer season that saw a number of significant bushfires in the west of the state, flood response, storm recovery, and several deployments, the end of Victoria's fire season has drawn to a close with the final fire restrictions lifted on Wednesday, 1 May.

Although the summer fire season is over, we know that the colder months bring a new set of challenges, and as a result, the valued work of our CFA volunteers will not stop. Our focus continues to be on a wide range of community safety programs, and responding to residential and structure fires, road accidents, technical rescue and hazardous material incidents.

Now is the time to also encourage your local community members and landowners to register their burn-offs through Fire Permits Victoria, to check weather conditions before lighting up and advise them to follow local council laws and regulations to prevent unnecessary call outs for our members.

This month we also marked International Firefighters' Day (May 4) at our annual service at the Victorian Emergency Services Memorial in Treasury Gardens.

We gathered on Sunday, 5 May alongside hundreds of CFA and community members, CFA leaders and distinguished guests to honour the memory of our fellow firefighters who have gallantly lost their lives in the line of duty. It was a day to commemorate those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, recognising the exceptional commitment, courage and selfless service they gave in protecting their communities every day.

Recognised worldwide, the date of International Firefighters' Day coincides with St Florian's Day in recognition of St Florian, the patron saint of firefighters. I encourage us all to take a moment to

reflect on those who are no longer with us and recognise the incredible contribution our members continue to make every day.

On a brighter note, following a successful launch of our first statewide volunteer recruitment campaign 'Give Us a Hand' late last year, which saw a 92% increase in volunteer expressions of interest, a refreshed campaign will kick off again this month.

To adequately prepare and onboard potential volunteers in time for the 2024-25 season, we will be running another burst of targeted paid advertising throughout winter in region allocations in need of our help.

Supporting this will be significant media coverage showcasing profile features of our volunteers across Victoria through our own social media channels, News and Media website, as well as statewide and local print, radio and online video.

The campaign addresses key recruitment challenges facing CFA, with hopes to attract a younger cohort (aged 18-34) of volunteers to solidify the future of CFA, while also boosting the number of firefighters who can respond during the day.

Last month, Lancefield, Bullengarook, Springfield and Tatura celebrated the official handover of their new tankers alongside their members, CFA leaders and Emergency Services Minister Jaclyn Symes (see articles on page 4).



While in April we unveiled our new state of the art and purpose built \$3.4 million Fire Investigation Training Facility and Victorian Emergency Management Training Centre (VEMTC) in Huntly (see article on this page).

Being one of its kind in Australasia, the centre will enable our firefighters and other emergency service personnel to learn how to investigate the origin and cause of fires in a safe and controlled environment.

Chief Officer Jason Heffernan was recently honoured to present CFA members with the CFA Unit Citation for Service and the Chief Officer's Commendation for their incredible efforts at the school bus accident in Exford near Eynesbury last May with their fellow emergency service volunteers (see page 4).

While this month also saw Korumburra (page 10), Buxton (page 11) and Murrumbidgee-Woodbourne (page 11) fire brigades celebrate their respective milestones of 125, 80 and 75 years.

## New smoke alarm program

RACV and CFA have announced a Smoke Alarm Installation program for rural and regional Victoria, providing 500 at-risk residents, such as renters and elderly Victorians, with free smoke alarms.

The program also aims to increase the understanding and awareness of home fire hazards and reduce the number of preventable fire fatalities.

Smoke alarms play a critical role in early fire detection and evacuation, yet statistics indicate many homes either do not have enough smoke alarms or have them installed in the wrong areas.

CFA Chief Officer Jason Heffernan said it's vital everyone has a working smoke alarm in their homes to prevent house fire fatalities.

"We've seen the devastating results of house fires where there wasn't a working smoke alarm, so this is an important program to ensure we're helping our communities, especially those more vulnerable such as renters and elderly Victorians," Chief Officer Heffernan said.

Warning signs of fault and age with your smoke alarm include: the smoke alarm unit turning a yellow colour; a continuous 'chirp' sound; your smoke alarm activating for no reason.

CFA recommends all smoke alarms in the home be powered by a 10-year lithium battery, be interconnected and installed in every bedroom, living area and hallway on your property.

## CFA help raise \$1.8m toward RCH

Caroline Springs Captain Anthony Jenkins with members Sammie Lowe and Lauchlan Wright and CFA Group General Manager Kylee Bates at the cheque handover.



## VFBV BOARD VACANCIES

### Invitation to ALL CFA Volunteers to apply

Closing date for written applications is 2 September 2024

VFBV advances the interests of all Victorian fire brigade volunteers

Vacancies on VFBV Board will arise when the terms of four VFBV Board members expire on 1 October 2024. Of the four members whose terms are expiring, two are eligible for reappointment. VFBV invites applications from any CFA volunteer who is motivated by the prospect of making a difference and believes they have the skills to contribute to the VFBV Board.

The role of a board member involves contributing to VFBV direction, policy determination and monitoring the performance and governance of the Association. This includes actively contributing to policy discussion, consulting with CFA volunteers and contributing to the identification and management of strategic issues.

VFBV is seeking applications from gender and culturally diverse candidates in addition to a diverse range of skills and experience including applications from diverse brigade types and classifications.

Members should familiarise themselves with the VFBV Board member role statement and key selection criteria available from the VFBV website or via the office at (03) 9886 1141.

Applications close on Monday 2 September 2024 and must be lodged to VFBV, 9/24 Lakeside Drive, Burwood East 3151; email vfbv@vfbv.com.au; telephone 9886 1141; fax: 9886 1618.