

CFA needs volunteers to monitor grasslands

CFA is encouraging Victorians to become ‘citizen scientists’ and help strengthen critical information about the fire risk.

Grassland curing is the annual drying out of grass and the drier the grass becomes, the higher the fire risk. At this time of year, curing data feeds directly into CFA’s fire danger calculations, making accurate figures essential for determining fire danger ratings. The ground observations are combined with satellite imagery to produce weekly maps that show how dry the grass is across Victoria.

CFA Remote Sensing Ana-

lyst Dr **Danielle Wright** said boosting the number of trained observers will help fill gaps in the data coverage.

“There are still a few areas of the state including the north-east, north-west and south-west where we would really benefit from having more volunteers out on the ground. In regions where on-ground observations are not occurring, we are solely relying on satellite data.

“The satellite model is extremely useful, but it can’t always pick up every detail, it can overestimate and underestimate curing. Cloud cover can block readings for weeks, grass under trees can be missed entirely and rainfall can impact readings.

“After rain new green shoots might appear, but they’re tiny and don’t affect fire behaviour. The satellite sees green and assumes the area is of lower risk. Having volunteers makes a huge difference. They’re the ones confirming what is actually happening on the ground and capturing the details the model often misses.”

John Taubman has been a ‘citizen scientist’ for nine years and says the role is a great way to serve the community and provide more accurate fire risk information.

“Being a grassland observer really sharpens your awareness of how the environment changes from day to day.

“You learn to read the landscape, from the wind and temperature to the humidity. You don’t always need instruments to tell it’s a bad fire day.

“The satisfaction comes from knowing we are providing a service to the community. The more data points we

Seasonal Bushfire Outlook predicts warmer than average summer

by CFA Chief Officer Jason Heffernan

This year’s fire season is upon us and as we saw in the AFAC Seasonal Bushfire Outlook for summer, a warmer than average summer is likely with above average risk in parts of the state.

Although the community may see a lot of green grass right now, much of it is superficial, with very hard dry soil beneath. Without continuous heavy rainfall every week, evaporation will remain strong and dryness will prevail across the forests. I have been reminded by many long serving members from the regions ... don’t be fooled.

The recent statewide Get

have on the map, the more accurate the data is.”

Danielle said becoming a grassland observer is a simple yet highly valuable way to support local fire safety.

“Everyone is welcome to participate, not just CFA volunteers. It’s a great way to support CFA without needing to be on the fireground.”

For more information: visit www.cfa.vic.gov.au/grass or email grassland@cfa.vic.gov.au

Fire Ready initiative held across October was a great success with more than 500 brigades hosting community events. We also saw almost 500 Victorians put their hands up to join CFA during this initiative, which was pleasing to see. Well done to all those involved, you should feel proud of what you’ve achieved in helping prepare your communities for the current fire season.

I understand the ongoing concerns and pressures with the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund (ESVF). We are constantly monitoring the situation and talking to our brigades about their status and intention as we move through our preparedness program for the fire season. This is a changing environment, but the community can be confident that we have the resources to respond and protect them.

The Victorian Government recently allocated more than \$10 million additional funds to CFA to deliver enhanced mobile and static water capabilities, and diesel fuel support for firefighting operations this summer. Mobile bulk water units holding more



than 20,000 litres will be deployed from several bases, with priority given to drought-affected regions and areas with limited access to surface water. Up to five mobile contracted bulk diesel fuel vehicles and/or tankers carrying more than 10,000 litres will be positioned primarily in Western Victoria. This will reduce the time and distance vehicles need to travel to replenish water supplies and ensure fuel availability this fire season. CFA will also install static bulk water tanks holding more than 100,000 litres at strategic locations. This initiative is designed to complement local response arrangements.

We have recently released the Right Lane Report into Recruitment and Onboarding and soon will be releasing our Contemporary Volunteer Membership Model Paper for member and VFBV feedback. I ask that you take the summer to consider both reports and I will make contact again in March to consolidate your feedback and provide next steps.

As we head into the festive season, please look after each other and enjoy this time with your loved ones. Stay safe and take care this fire season.

VFBV VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

2025/26 Annual Survey

We want to know your views on your CFA experience, good and bad.

Our annual survey gives you the opportunity to provide feedback confidentially, but in a form that allows us to use your feedback to effect real change.

Tell us about CFA Training, your brigade, how well consultation is working, and whether you feel adequately recognised and respected by CFA and the Victorian Government.

Last year, more than 2,000 volunteers participated. Make your opinion count and take the survey today.

Scan the QR code or visit <https://www.vfbv.com.au/cfa>



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