

VFBV QUARTERLY SUPPLEMENT



March 2022

Welcome to the March edition of the quarterly VFBV feature supplement. The supplement includes relevant news, updates and information on current issues being pursued by VFBV on behalf of members.

VFBV is your association, so please stay connected, respond to feedback requests and get involved.

Adam Barnett

CEO, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria.

Additional Resources and Updates Available Electronically

International Women's Day 2022	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-supp27
CFA External Review of Culture	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-supp24
Australia Day Honours 2022	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-supp26

VFBV Quarterly Supplement Enclosures

Your December enclosures include:	Action Required:
1. CFA-VFBV State Firefighter Championships	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard
2. Editorial: Don't be a drip. Take a sip!	Please table and note
3. Editorial: Have you had your say?	Please table and note
4. Fire Wise Extract: Volunteers sidelined again	Please table and note
5. 2 Minute Briefings (Joint Committee's)	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard
6. Update your CFA Member Record	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard



STATE FIREFIGHTER CHAMPIONSHIPS

Urban Junior State Championships	19/20 March 2022, Mooroopna
Urban Senior State Championships	26/27 March 2022, Mooroopna
Rural State Senior Championships	26 March 2022, Mooroopna
Rural State Junior Championships	27 March 2022, Mooroopna

The CFA-VFBV State Firefighter Championships will be held at Mooroopna later this month. On the first weekend, there will be 37 Junior teams competing in 18 events over the 19 and 20 March.

On the following weekend, the Rural State Junior and Senior Championships will be held, alongside the Urban State Senior Championships. Across this weekend will be 32 Junior teams and 78 Senior teams competing across the urban and rural tracks in a celebration and showcase of CFA and championships.

More than 250 VFBV Judges and Officials will volunteer their time and expertise to ensure our State Championships continue to maintain the high standard developed over many years. VFBV thanks all these members for their commitment and encourages any new members interested in nominating as a Judge to contact championships@vfbv.com.au

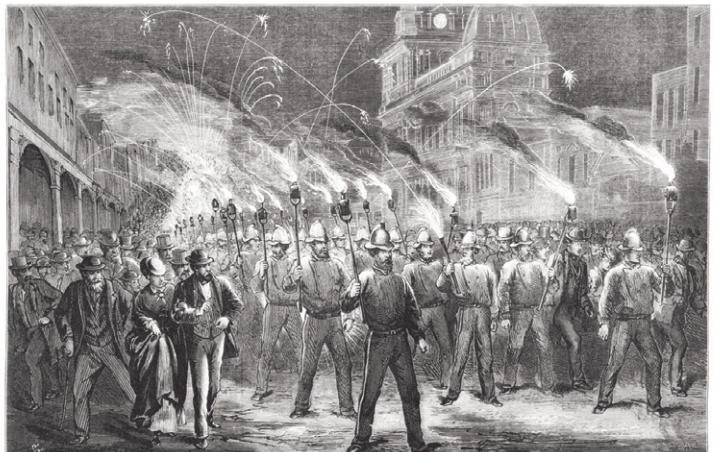
2022 Torchlight Procession

The first demonstration and display of Victoria's volunteer firefighters was held in Melbourne in 1873 and included a Torchlight Procession through the streets of Melbourne.

The tradition continued until just two years ago when the Torchlight Procession had to be cancelled due to COVID-19, but it is back on again this year on Saturday 28 March. It will be led by the CFA Chief Officer, his deputies, VFBV and CFA officers and followed by the brigades competing over the weekend.

Any brigade not competing, is also invited to participate in the Torchlight Procession either as a spectator or as participants in the march. Please contact Peter Davis via

p.davis@cfa.vic.gov.au or
0458 933 797 as soon as possible.





EDITORIAL

Don't be a drip. Take a sip!

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Published: 'Fire Wise' February 2022 and adapted for VFBV Quarterly Supplement

Well, what an interesting fire season this is shaping up to be. While we often joke about the four seasons in a day when describing Melbourne weather, this would actually be a very fitting description of the fire season so far.

And while there is still plenty of season left before we call it, predictions of a milder and wetter season have certainly been accurate, with the usual run of spike days sprinkled in for good measure. Despite heavy rain in some areas, there are still large parts of the State that are bone dry and require our vigilance. Recent fires along the Victorian/South Australian border and throughout the western districts are a good example of how quickly things can turn.

Thank you to all members who have done an exceptional job and gone from dealing with fire on one day, only to then swing into supporting storm and flood emergencies on the next. Lightning has been a particular aggravator this season and will likely continue over the next little while. The agility, professionalism and duty displayed by all responding members has been outstanding as usual.

And while I touched on heat safety messages and the importance of hydration in last month's column, a recent small spike of heat-related incidents from recent fires urges me to repeat it.

Please remember to hydrate, hydrate, hydrate. Drinking when you're thirsty is too late. Thirst is your body's alarm bell that you are approaching serious dehydration. And even then, it can take 45 minutes for your body to rehydrate from the fluids you take to quench that thirst. More serious dehydration can lead to heat stroke or sending your body into shock and land you in hospital where best case scenario is you're looking at a minimum of 24 hours of intravenous fluids.

It sounds like such a simple message that we often feel embarrassed to have to say it, but it is one of those basics that can be easily overlooked when we get so busy. And while the extra humidity is throwing us all for a bit of a loop with the extra perspiration, it can't hurt to keep the message on full rotation.

Could I please request crew leaders and senior vols continue to spruik the message at every opportunity. There may very well be a member whose life you save from this very simple reminder.

COVID-SAFE

Thank-you also to members for the very disciplined approach crews are continuing to take with COVID safe practices on the fire ground. We have continued our outstanding record of keeping COVID exposures to an absolute minimum.

This is not only critical to keep our brigades online but protects our service delivery and vital volunteer surge capacity.

This hard work and diligence are paying off, with exposures acquired through CFA activities remaining relatively low. This demonstrates the professionalism of all CFA members and the efficacy of high compliance with the COVID-Safe basics of physical distancing, sanitising and ensuring masks are worn on those occasions that physical distance cannot be maintained. (Such as in the fire truck.)

VFBV continues to work hard with stakeholders to ensure members are supported through the pandemic, with the VFBV Welfare Fund continuing to catch anyone falling through the cracks and needing some extra assistance.

After long advocacy, the ability to request targeted additional vaccine hubs for areas that have been having difficulty accessing booster shots is finally a reality. If you have been having difficulty making a booking due to limited opportunities in your area, please ensure this gets raised with your Captain or Group Officer so it can be raised with your ACFO. Deputy Chief Officers now have the ability to submit requests for additional hubs from health for areas experiencing shortages, and where local demand indicates a need. So, ensuring this information



is fed through your chain of command remains critical in making sure we match resources with demand.

Also a reminder to members that under the Government's new Pandemic Orders, all emergency services personnel (including CFA and SES volunteers) must update their vaccination record with the date of their third shot. (Booster.) The pandemic orders issued by the Health Minister on the 25th February 2022, requires all emergency services to be third-dosed and their agency vaccination record updated by the 12th March.

So if you have received your booster, please log-in to Brigades online, or call (03) 9262 8663 to update your record. Don't forget that these are not CFA's rules, so don't blame the person answering the phone. As a statutory authority, CFA is required to follow the Government's legislation approved by Parliament which has made it compulsory for emergency service agencies to collect and store this information.

I am also pleased to report that CFA's Service Delivery Reporting Centre is now fully available to assist members update their CFA vaccine records. The dedicated staff that support brigades entering their fire reports 7 days a week have now been upskilled to support vaccine recording as part of business as usual. While previously the vaccine hotline only operated during business hours with limited staff, with the extra training and commitment from the SDRC staff, members may now phone the SDRC on (03) 9262 8663 anytime between 9am and 9pm - seven days a week to update their vaccination status.

While it is still preferred that members update their own status via the website, for those who can't access Brigades online or are having difficulty, the phone option is a terrific way to provide an extra option for people who need a little more help and support to update their status.

And with the extra capacity now online, you will likely get straight through. So, if you've been put off by some delays in the past and have given up – give it another go. It's easy and simple and should only take a minute or two.

And finally, VFBV is continuing to push for the increased provision of rapid antigen tests for all emergency service workers, to assist members who are exposed to COVID positive cases through their emergency response roles.

VFBV has been very critical of the approach taken by the sector to date that has seen CFA (and other emergency service partners) not receive any priority allocation of RATs from Government held supplies. Instead, CFA and other agencies have been at the mercy of their own individual procurement processes on the open market, which has been extremely challenging given limited supplies across the private sector.

VFBV has sought the support and assistance of the Minister for Emergency Services and continues to advocate for greater Government support and assistance to help provide members with appropriate options to minimise isolation and other considerations that stem from COVID exposures experienced by volunteer emergency responders that impact themselves, their families, their employers and their businesses.

VALE

Our thoughts and prayers are with the family, friends and loved ones of South Australian CFS volunteer firefighter Louise Hincks.

Louise was fighting a blaze near Lucindale (in South Australia's southeast) on the 21st January 2022 when she was hit by a falling, burning branch, as she and her crew battled the blaze, causing fatal injuries.

Louise was a devoted mother of two and joined the CFS in 1994. A member of the CFS Happy Valley Brigade, she was also a qualified psychologist in her everyday role which she used over the years to help dozens of her fellow CFS volunteers.

Louise was much loved and embodied the virtues and spirit of all volunteer firefighters, signing up to her local CFS brigade (Eden Hills) as a teenager and selflessly serving her community for almost 30 years with distinction – always looking to help others.

She will be sorely missed, and her tragic loss is felt across the entire firefighting family. VFBV on behalf of all Victorian firefighters extends its deepest sympathies to Louise's family, brigade, peers and loved ones.

A fellow volunteer working with Louise was also seriously injured at the same time, and is expected to make a full recovery. We wish him a speedy recovery and also pay tribute to all responding crews, including CFA members, who assisted with cross border operations to bring the blaze under control.

WELFARE & EFFICIENCY SURVEY

Thank-you to all members who have completed the VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey. There has been a terrific response so far. The survey is now in its final weeks, so if you haven't yet had a chance to do the survey, please visit www.vfbv.com.au/cfa to do it now.

The survey is a critical way to link grass roots members with decision makers and ensure that volunteers influence current and future priorities. It only takes about 10 minutes, and is central to keeping us informed about what is working and what isn't.

It's ok to feel cynical from time to time about how long some things take to change. We all feel this way at times, but the important thing is to never give up.

I am constantly inspired by the passion and enthusiasm of our volunteers, and the selfless dedication and duty they display on a daily basis to keep their communities safe. It's this passion that motivates us to never give up and always keep trying. Participating in the annual survey is one small way we can all help the cause and ensure that volunteer views and feedback are at the top of the agenda.

To round out this month's theme, I'll leave you with a quote about water that intertwines perfectly with our commitment to volunteer advocacy:

"A river cuts through a rock not because of its power, but because of its persistence."

Stay safe (and don't forget to hydrate!)



Have you had your say?

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Published: 'Fire Wise' January 2022 and adapted for VFBV Quarterly Supplement

Welcome to 2022!

With temperatures exceeding 40 degrees in many parts of the State as we welcomed in the new year, it is a timely reminder for members to practice heat safety.

Just last month, Risk Frontiers published its latest research on fatalities caused by natural hazards in Australia. The latest research expanded on their previous work analysing heatwave fatalities between 1844 to 2010, where it was determined that heatwaves were second only to disease epidemics in lives lost from natural hazards. The latest research looks in depth at the period between July 2000 to June 2018 and finds that half of all heatwave fatalities occurred in Victoria, and a quarter in South Australia.

While many of us carry the tragic losses of the 2009 Black Saturday fires in our memories (173 fatalities) it is far less recalled that health authorities attributed 374 fatalities to the southeast Australia heatwave between 25 th Jan – 9th Feb, 2009. Similarly, the defining Black Friday fires of 1939 that led to the formation of CFA recorded 71 deaths, but the preceding heatwave led to 438.

Which begs the question, why isn't more being done to build public education and awareness on the importance of having an extreme-heat plan to compliment other emergency plans like fire and storm? With the prediction of increased frequency of heatwaves, it is more important than ever to incorporate these conversations into our usual pre-summer community education. And while extreme heat emergencies fall more within the health sector than fire, many of the messages are complementary and fit well together in our pursuit of community resilience and safety.

Closer to home, the importance of managing heat related stress remains critical to firefighter safety. Members are urged to be proactively hydrating at work or home prior to attending a call-out, and crew leaders and strike team leaders are reminded to monitor crews and ensure fluids and task rotation are being managed on the fireground. Operations bulletins recommend 15-20 minutes work re-

quires 20 mins rest in a shaded area during hot days. And lower arm cooling and use of cool wet towels under the arm pits and around the neck are all very effective methods to return cool blood to the core of the body during rest breaks.

The very late signs of dehydration include the onset of headache, dizziness, nausea, cramps and dry skin. If left untreated, dehydration can very quickly progress to heat stroke, so please don't wait until you are thirsty to drink water, and don't forget that water alone will not be enough to rehydrate you from fluids lost from sweat. During active workload, firefighters can lose more than a litre of water per hour, so it is critical that sufficient water and electrolyte fluids are available to your crews.

OPERATING MODEL REVIEW

As the year finished up, I had the most unpleasant task of requesting volunteer feedback on EMV's draft operating model review with a ridiculously short feedback deadline. Despite being published on the 17 November, the draft operating model review was provided four days before Christmas, with EMV requesting feedback by mid-January.

To say I was disappointed would be an understatement. To provide this timeline over the Christmas/New Year period during our busiest time of year is frankly disgraceful. The lack of volunteer consultation throughout the review became very evident upon reading the draft. Rather than focus on the task of supporting and building emergency management capability across Class 1 and Class 2 agencies across the whole EM sector, the review seems to narrowly focus on building capacity by using largely Victorian public sector employees and recommending 'permanent' IMT's. As one senior volunteer remarked to me after they read it - 'it seems like they started with a recommendation then wrote the report to support the outcome.'

And whilst the VPS benefits from tangible targets and rec-

ommendations for business cases, the section purportedly addressing volunteer barriers and lack of support, training and accreditation for the sectors overwhelming volunteer workforce is simply backed up by what I can only describe as dismissive comments, motherhood statements and touchy-feely sentiments. Incredibly disappointing.

And while I could go on and on (and on) about the review's shortcomings, and its lack of credibility given the poor consultation process - I will await further volunteer feedback. For those who have already responded – thank you. For those that requested we communicate your anger at the poor process and ridiculous timelines, rest assured we will strongly communicate your frustrations.

If you are a senior volunteer with IMT experience operating at the Level 2 and 3 incident levels, and are interested in reviewing the report and providing written feedback to help inform VFBV's position, please contact your District Council or Mark Dryden on m.dryden@vfbv.com.au

VOL SURVEY

A reminder that the most important annual survey that directly impacts and influences future priorities for CFA volunteers is underway and will close shortly. The VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency survey is the largest survey of its kind in Victoria and connects grass root volunteers directly to decision makers to influence funding, priorities and initiatives aimed at improving CFA.

The survey opened on the 24th November, and will be open for around 12 weeks to provide plenty of opportunity for volunteers to participate. I have yet to meet a volunteer who does not have an opinion on how well or how poor things are going within the fire services. Yet, when I attend brigades and groups to discuss particular issues of concern, I am often asked about why certain projects or initiatives are underway, with people asking whose crazy idea said system/process or project was.

Yet when I then ask how many of those present actually completed this year's survey, it is clear how these ideas get up. As I point out – priorities and budgets are heavily influenced by those that do provide feedback, and how else do they expect VFBV to influence these conversations if they are not contributing to the data and our influence on a regular basis.

A quote attributed to President Harry Truman following his win in the 1948 American election was "decisions are made by those who show up." And while this was particularly poignant for a country that does not have mandatory voting, I would argue it is equally important for an opt-in survey such as ours that was designed by volunteers for volunteers and has established itself as one of the most reliable measures of CFA volunteer sentiment and opinion we have.

A much less flattering sentiment to Truman's could be 'some show up and make the decisions, and some don't show up and complain about the decisions being made.' And while I think this is an over-simplistic analogy, it certainly does serve to highlight the importance of getting involved.

The survey asks for your opinion on most aspects of your CFA experience. From training, consultation, people management, support from and cooperation across CFA, culture, how well volunteers are respected and how you feel about the future.

We take your privacy seriously with all your answers being confidential, and we never share your personal details with anyone including CFA. All results are deidentified, yet every comment and every response is analysed to understand what is working well and what isn't. Results and themes from last year's survey have been instrumental in discussions onboarding the new CFA leaders including the CEO, Chief and members of the executive. For example, the cooperation-themed questions provide feedback on engagement between volunteers and CFA by requesting information on whether volunteers feel they have been given adequate opportunity to provide input and feedback into decisions that affect them.

In recent results - volunteers indicated that they often get 'direction' from CFA and decisions are often made without consultation which diminishes the recognition of the skills and knowledge of senior and experienced volunteers. There was a strong feeling that even when consultation opportunities are presented or invited, decisions have already been made and it is just lip service. These are important perspectives that help us to work with CFA on improving things.

In the comments provided by respondents last year, many made some reference to the divide, even referred to as a chasm in some instances, between some paid staff and volunteers. A familiar thread to the comments was that they felt in some cases they were set up to fail. A common theme was that volunteers and brigades were often criticised for things they were not given adequate support for, sometimes by the very people employed to support them. And while I truly believe that CFA is full of highly dedicated, experienced and passionate people both paid and unpaid, this feedback helps provide a barometer on how well people are walking the walk and talking the talk and allows us to zero in on areas where certain trends are emerging.

So please, if you haven't yet done this year's survey head over to www.vfbv.com.au/cfa and do it today. We want to hear from you. The only way you can help us influence the CFA of tomorrow, is by doing something about it today.

Stay safe.

Volunteers sidelined again

By Fireman Sam, Published: 'Fire Wise' February 2022

I read Adam Barnett's comments about the EMV Operating Model Review in the January edition of Fire Wise and based on his comments my alarm bells started to ring. So, I obtained a copy of the consultation paper so that I could see the detail of what was being proposed and to provide feedback for VFBV's formal reply. After reading the proposals my reaction was to wonder where the EMV personnel and their consultants who prepared the consultation paper have been over the last couple of decades. If they read the history of Victoria's experiences with fire, flood, and storm and the findings that emerged from the various inquiries and investigations they should know that the community must be the foundation for any effective emergency management planning.

My next thought was about the consultation process. Shouldn't the consultation phase take place before the preparation of a report and proposals? I am inclined to agree with the senior volunteer quoted as saying 'it seems like they started with a recommendation then wrote the report to support the outcome.' So, it is of great concern that EMV, a body wholly comprised of public servants or government appointees, have proposed new arrangements that are a typical public servant solution to any problem – more public servants!

It also displays a total lack of appreciation and understanding of the capacity and ability of Victoria's emergency management volunteers, even though the reliance on their experience and contributions is consistently acknowledged in official publications produced by EMV and the Government.

"Safer and more resilient communities is always our aim. How we recognise what is important to communities, the consequences of emergencies and work with those who can make a difference is fundamental." (EMV Website)

Given the above, why propose the establishment of a Corp of Public Servants but ignore the option of tapping into the existing rich pool of emergency management experience and local knowledge within the army of existing registered volunteers? The establishment of a Corp of Public Servants would be an effective method of sourcing people with particular technical and administrative skills to support Incident Management Teams, however they are unlikely to possess the vital attributes of community connection and local knowledge experienced volunteers could provide. Only locals really know how their patch is being impacted by climate change, land use changes and how the people are adapting to cope with those changes.

Rather than devoting energy and funding to the creation of permanent hotshot IMTs and a Public Service Corp perhaps EMV should re-consider the proposed course of action and whether they asked the right question. If the problem they are trying to address is the difficulty in assembling Level 3 IMTs and maintaining them over long duration campaigns then perhaps the question needed to be why aren't there enough competent people to meet the needs?

Even a cursory look at recent years will expose that the lack of training courses for volunteers and a failure to provide opportunities for budding Level 3 personnel to gain experience is the real cause of the shortage of competent people. We all know that there have been a plethora of opportunities during the last five years to develop and assess additional people, but it was not done. There was a specific program of training commenced but for some reason it went off the rails, leaving participating volunteers disenchanted with the poor level of support they received.

A re-direction of priorities and energy to training volunteers and improving the performance of lower level Incident Management personnel is the quickest and most effective way to reduce the need for Level 3 personnel. If Level 2 personnel are better trained, have access to better equipped facilities and can continue to effectively manage emergencies then there will be less need for imposition of Level 3 Teams. The added benefit of such a strategy is that the greater number of experienced Level 2 personnel would provide a larger pool from which to recruit Level 3 personnel. They would also be more likely to possess that important factor – local knowledge.

The development of Incident Action Plans (IAPs), community plans and strategies that will best address what is important to a particular community must include locals who recognise what is important to (their) communities and can make a difference to the consequences of emergencies.

The EMV quote above acknowledges that such an approach is fundamental.

Community Engagement is a term that has become established in the language used by the EM Sector, but what does it actually mean? Engagement is a word with quite a range of meanings. It certainly has nothing to do with the giving of a ring BUT if it implies there is a commitment to involve members of the community in a process or activity, then the question becomes:- what level of involvement?

On their website, EMV makes the point that the established State EM Priorities that guide development of control and response plans have evolved to now also apply to planning, mitigation, response, relief and recovery - Before, During, After. Active involvement and connection with members of the community is now seen as an essential to all aspects of Emergency Management.

The recognition that the Priorities must apply to all phases of Emergency Management and to the "all communities all emergencies" approach has seen some tweaking of the original fire and flood priorities first documented during the 2002-03 Alpine Fires campaign, but they remain largely the same; human life being the top priority.

Community Resilience is heavily dependent on the degree of community involvement. More than that, it is a factor of community self-determination.

A Community that has been engaged in the process of determining the content of their plan is far more likely to know and understand the plan, trust the plan, follow the plan, and work together to try and achieve the best possible outcomes. I have been around long enough to know that the consultation process being followed with regard to the EMV Proposal seems to be along the lines of the tried and true approach generally used to get a desired outcome.

Prepare a report and proposals that suit your intent, send it out for comment (that's called consultation); take minimal notice of the feedback and do what you wanted to do anyway. If, like me, you have real concerns about where our State is heading with regard to embracing and facilitating the utilisation of volunteers in Incident Management Teams and the inclusion and active involvement of people with local knowledge as essential components in all phases of Emergency Management then you need to raise your concerns with people in high places.



VFBV | VOLUNTEER FIRE
BRIGADES VICTORIA

2 Minute Briefings March 2022

The 2 Minute Briefings are a quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

They are intended to update members on key issues that have recently been discussed. Effort is made to include any related items that may have been progressed out of session or through other avenues that are related to each committee's subject matter. Priority is given to topics where recent progress has been made. Topics where no progress has been made or where there are differences of opinion are sometimes included to ensure members are aware of VFBV efforts in continuing to advocate for progress or outcomes.

Joint Committees are formal committees between CFA and VFBV made up of VFBV delegates appointed by VFBV State Council, and CFA management representatives appointed by CFA. They are a critical loop in our consultative structures. They endeavour to work collaboratively and cooperatively on issues but may also be required to escalate issues where resolution or common ground cannot be found - requiring executive attention.

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

CYBER SECURITY POLICY

The Committee has discussed the CFA Cyber Risk Mitigation Project, with delegates requesting further discussion on potential volunteer impacts prior to the proposed changes being made to the logon protocols for CFA Members Online.

While supportive of some of benefits to increased security, such as protecting confidentiality of information assets like personal and health information, providing integrity by controlling access to information in line with best practices and enabling availability of data and information for emergency services in a secure and managed form, some of the changes may present some practical issues. Changes to multi factor authentication (the use of security questions), greater control of log on password usage (specific mix of characters and formats), regular password change requirements (every 60-90 days) and the use of a verification code system to a phone (SMS pin notification) need to be properly tested to understand what impacts this may have on regional and remote based IT systems where internet access is not always reliable.

Delegates have requested broader consultation and testing before the introduction of these changes to better understand real world usage and reliability of systems to cater for volunteers who often need to use their own devices and equipment.

MEMBERS PORTAL FEEDBACK

Delegates have provided initial feedback on recent changes to the members online website including changes to the search functionality, an opt-in subscription service to target roles, a semi-regular reminder to update your member's details and an option asking whether you would like a CFA email address to name just a few points of discussion. Delegates have also discussed issues identified when setting up the CFA members email address in Microsoft Outlook.

CFA has confirmed the intent to provide better member access to members online and to provide greater information for volunteers through the online portal and welcomed the feedback provided.

Delegates have also raised the issue of inconsistency with logins, with some applications using the firstname.lastname@members log in, whilst others require you to enter your volunteer number@cfa instead. Members have also highlighted the ability to have role-based access or notifications would greatly assist newly elected officers of brigades and groups. Additional feedback complimented the use of the recent documents as a good feature however, noted difficulty in searching for them when they disappear from the recent documents page.

Document accuracy and versioning continues to be a challenge, with delegates highlighting that some information is circulated from CFA via email and then takes some time before it is available, with conflicting versions sometimes causing confusion. All members are encouraged to provide feedback on the online portal changes via a link on Members on Line Home page (under feedback link at the very bottom of the page) or via <https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/help/members-online-how-to-guides/contact-members-online>

COMMAND TALK GROUPS

Back in November 2020 CFA reported to the Committee about the introduction of RMR Admin and Command Talk groups however at the time they were not available for access by FFMVic radios. CFA has advised that DELWP has now completed the work to reflash all their fire vehicles with the new channel plan. This means the use of the RMR Admin and Command Talkgroups is available between CFA and FFMVic.

An update with the new RMR sites is also available for the Uniden scanners via: <https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/brigades-operational/operational-communication-equipment/uniden-scanners/update-to-uniden-scanner-rmr-sites-channels>

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

NEW AUSTRALIAN FIRE DANGER RATING SYSTEM UPDATE

The committee has reviewed progress of Australia's new Fire Danger Rating System planned to be introduced nationally in mid 2022. Australia's current Fire Danger Ratings are nearly 70 years old and are applied and displayed differently in each state. This can lead to confusion about what the ratings mean particularly in the border regions and holiday destinations. Eight years ago, agencies came together to begin developing a national system of Fire Danger Ratings that would be consistent across all jurisdictions in appearance and messaging. The 2019/20 'Black Summer' fires added urgency to the need to complete this project, and the resulting Commonwealth Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements recommended this work be expedited.

The new national system will have four fire danger rating categories (instead of the current six) and will be intended to have clear and concise meaning for each of the categories so that they are easy to be understood and incorporated into people's fire plans. The science behind the new ratings has also been completely overhauled, replacing the current reliance on just the grass and forest indexes, and moving to a new system that predicts fire behaviour across eight broad fuel types. (Grasslands, buttongrass, savanna, spinifex, mallee heath, shrubland, forest and pine.)

The replacement of the existing road side Fire Danger Rating signs is intended to commence mid-year with work currently being undertaken in consultation with brigades to establish which locations provide the best visibility for motorists as well as ensuring the safety of members who update manual signs. VFBV delegates to the committee are continuing to call for more automatic signs to replace the manual signs, with the manual signs requiring volunteers to manually update then often alongside busy roads which present significant safety risks. Further information on the new Australian Fire Danger Rating System can be found at <https://www.afac.com.au/initiative/afdrs/afdrs-overview>

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Committee members are providing input on the development of the CFA Community Engagement framework public facing document. Work has been ongoing on developing a framework for how CFA can better engage with communities on matters of community safety. This framework is designed to give a consistent approach while also acknowledging that our communities are diverse, with each facing a different risk, as well as the importance of drawing on local knowledge and experience from within each individual community. A vital part of this development has been the acknowledgement of shared responsibility – where community safety is an equal partnership between CFA and community members.

Feedback is also being sought from the public, community groups, leaders, government bodies, businesses etc. on how they want to be engaged by CFA and what they see their role is in relation to fire preparedness. We will provide updates on the development of this as it progresses.

SCHOOLS IN FIRE COUNTRY

The Schools in Fire Country (SiFC) project is a multi-agency collaboration to design and develop a bushfire education program for upper primary school children following recommendations from numerous public enquiries. The program has been developed using over ten years of research and inspired by some of the programs already existing in the school system.

Schools in Fire Country aims to best understand how students most effectively learn about fire and other natural disasters. The program will be designed as a series of modules which are to be delivered in classrooms but will place emphasis on the importance of local knowledge and using local experts. The first trial school is underway but, if members are aware of a school that works closely with its local brigade in Fire Safety and Community Engagement, they can nominate by talking to your Community Safety Manager in your District Office.

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

TANKER RADIATOR TRIALS

The Committee has continued to investigate reports from some Districts of late model tankers overheating due to the radiators getting clogged with debri. While CFA agreed to redesign the radiator shrouding early last year to alleviate the problem, recent reports from some parts of the state suggest the issue remains. DMOs are now trialling a few possible solutions, including a trial on some 3.4C tankers where a piping system has been installed with air flow nozzles that allow brigades to blow out and clear the radiators with compressed air either on the fire ground or when the tanker is returning to station.

Delegates will continue to monitor and have also requested CFA consider the location and type of radiator as other options continue to be investigated. Brigades are encouraged to report any overheating to the DMOs so that the issue can be tracked. Drivers of late model tankers are also requested to remain vigilant in monitoring the temperature when involved in fireground operations, especially in conditions with a lot of ground debri that may potentially block radiators.

BA PRESCRIPTION INSERTS

More than 400 Breathing Apparatus (BA) wearers across the state have registered for a prescription spectacle insert during the roll out of the MSAG1 Breathing Apparatus.

Members with the BA competency who wear prescription glasses may benefit from a new spectacle insert, which allows them to wear prescription glasses without compromising the fit and seal of their BA mask, with a headset update on how to get the glasses kit installed as an insert on the headsets now complete. Members who require a spectacle insert will need to contact the district office and then visit a participating OPSM fitment outlet nearest to them to ensure the correct prescription lens is fitted. This may differ from their current prescription as the focal length between the eye and the spectacle kit will be different to typical prescription glasses.

The issue and fitments of the inserts will be a District based responsibility, but it is up to the individual to visit an approved optometrist who will manufacture and send them out to the individual.

QR CODE DMO FAULT REPORTING

Members will remember in our June 2021 Edition we reported on an initiative developed by the DMO workshops for a mechanical fault reporting system via QR code. We can now report that after extensive testing the QR code reporting system is now operating across all district workshops. Improvements to the system are being made as issues arise. The QR code makes it easier for members to report any non-urgent mechanical faults by simply scanning the code with a mobile device and fill out the simple online form with details of the fault and contact details. The report is then sent to the closest DMO workshop so the work can be scheduled and rectified. The QR code reporting is not intended to replace the existing mechanical fault reporting that brigades are used to, but rather as another option for members.

NEXT GENERATION PUMPER

CFA has confirmed that it has agreed to establish a Next Generation Pumper working party to scope the capabilities and performance requirements of the next generation pumper. Members will remember the extensive consultation and volunteer input into the current Type 3 Scania Pumpers and it is hoped that volunteer input into the next generation pumper will mirror the last successful pumper build program. While the initial target will be to replace up to 50 NSW backed medium pumpers that are approaching end of life, the working party will also consider the needs of the future. The working party will be made up of volunteers and subject matter experts who will first develop a role statement then oversea the program as it progresses. We will keep you updated as this exciting project progresses

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

COMPLAINT RESOLUTION PROCESS

The Committee has discussed the progress of the improvements being made to CFA's complaint resolution process and the roll out of the CFA Behavioural Standards and new Complaint Resolution Guidelines.

During discussions with delegates, CFA has clarified that the case management systems initially explored by CFA were so financially prohibitive, that case management would now fall under the remit of the current HR Business Partners. Discussions also revealed that HR Business Partners (HRBPs) would be acting as the facilitators, providing the facilitated sessions of the Behaviour Standards to the 61 'High Priority' brigades identified by CFA.

There are currently seven HR Business Partners with one embedded across each of the five CFA Regions and two who are situated at Headquarters in Burwood, plus one senior manager. Delegates have expressed concern at the level of responsibility now falling to the HR Business Partners in the very sensitive and difficult area of complaints management and have sought clarification on how workload is being monitored. Delegates have also pointed out that there could be perceptions of bias considering the range of matters that a HR Business Partner is expected to manage locally within their allocated Region. Concerns have also been raised of the possible conflict of interests with HRBPs conducting initial mediation and then potentially launching investigations while simultaneously acting as case managers. Given the important role HRBP's will play, Delegates have requested a review of to ensure HRBP's training and skills are upskilled and supported given the increased responsibilities within the role. VFBV has requested ongoing updates as this work continues.

PRESENTATION FOR VOLUNTEERS CALLED TO CFA HEARINGS

VFBV has been advocating ardently for volunteers called to CFA Hearings to be afforded formal CFA support to help them in the hearing process and maintain CFA's duty of care to both the respondent as well as the organisation. At present volunteers must either represent themselves or find and potentially fund legal or other representation. And while VFBV can support and assist members navigate the process, the CFA Act limits our capacity in matters of discipline. For many, the hearing process can be difficult to understand, daunting, and some don't feel confident in defending themselves, or feel confident that they will get a fair hearing. VFBV acknowledge that engaging legal representation is not necessarily the best option at times, as a CFA hearing is not a court of law and the matters argued are not often of a legal nature but of a procedural nature. However, the committee agreed it was important for volunteers to be equally assisted in understanding and preparing for the process of a CFA Hearing in a less combative and more restorative environment. After long advocacy and following repeated requests of delegates over many years, CFA has now agreed to form a dedicated working group with VFBV delegates to investigate and identify further advocacy options best suited to volunteers and the CFA Hearing process. VFBV commend the decision of the new CFA leadership to finally acknowledge this issue and agree to address this long-standing inequity, and we look forward to further discussions.

EXTERNAL CONSULTANTS & COMPANIES CONTRACTED BY CFA

The committee discussed the unique nature of emergency response volunteering and community based fire brigades that do not always present as the usual 'workplace' environment that many external companies engaged by CFA might expect. Delegates have requested that prior to CFA contracting the services of any company, that these companies should undergo a formal induction and endorsement process to be made aware of the unique environment and the need to be flexible and more agile in their approach. The importance of allowing Brigades and Groups to contribute to the process should not be underestimated, and the need to adapt their service delivery to suit the local environment. In most cases, volunteers will give up their time and make themselves available if required, but external consultants and companies sometimes fail to grasp that this often means operating outside the typical nine-to-five business day environment, and timelines need to be flexible and account for other circumstances and competing priorities to accommodate volunteer needs.

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

LOCAL RESPONSE DATA PROJECT

The Committee has discussed CFA's Local Response Plan project which has been reviewed and updated with a name change to Local Response Data (LRD) and incorporates a more user-friendly approach with the inclusion of Avenza Mapping software. In the past local response plans were produced by brigades with support from the local group, district, and other emergency services with the goal to enhance bushfire or grassfire operational planning, preparedness and response. The new format LRD is not intended to replace the response plan, but rather support and inform them by providing information and mapping that will enhance the capability and knowledge of the incident controller. Avenza mapping is a mobile phone compatible mapping based product, that will allow a member to easily access information and store it on the phone for use at an incident. The working group is researching the opportunity to have maps also available at staging area's via an easily to use QR code that will improve fireground briefings.

MEDICAL RESPONSE

Delegates have long advocated for CFA's emergency medical response capability to support those areas where Ambulance Victoria need enhanced support for priority life threatening incidents. The committee continues to advocate for those Brigades that have written to VFBV requesting our support for regional areas. The Committee is monitoring ambulance response times and advocates for the program to be targeted to areas in most need and where good brigade capability exists. The strength of CFA's medical response program has been the close cooperation and collaboration between CFA and Ambulance Victoria, which has seen a strong synergy and partnership develop with the Ambulance Victoria Community Emergency Response Teams. VFBV will continue to support these discussions.

BREATHING APPARATUS STRATEGY

Delegates are calling on CFA to refresh and modernise its BA strategy and has requested CFA consult and communicate its strategy to the broader membership. Since Fire Service Reform shifted most of the CFA owned BA vans across to Fire Rescue Victoria in 2020, the need to revise and update CFA's BA strategy is critical.

Thanks to the generosity of Victorians and the wider community over the Summer of 2019/20, the CFA Donations Trust has allocated donated funds to purchase an additional 200 BA sets (400 cylinders) and additional associated gear. The new equipment is in the process of being distributed across the State as it becomes available, with some delays to the procurement caused by COVID-19. Delegates believe this should be the impetus to initiate more formal and robust discussions around a planned structured state-wide BA strategy that involves volunteers, brigades, groups, regions and districts. VFBV has requested consultation commence as soon as possible and looks forward to contributing to the discussion.

HAZARDOUS TREE ASSESSOR PILOT

VFBV enrolled four volunteer subject matter experts to undergo the Hazardous Tree Assessor Pilot program late last year with the support of CFA. Reports back from the delegates who attended the training at Mt Macedon were positive and generally complimentary of the training. Each provided valuable and constructive feedback on the program. The program was developed with the assistance of DEWLP trainers who undertake tree assessing across the state all year round and not just during the fire danger period. There are some concerns that CFA's aspirational target for qualified tree assessors may be a bit ambitious with committee members believing that something as important as hazardous tree assessing is more about quality than quantity. Discussion continues about how to ensure that qualified members are able to continually maintain their skills outside of the fire danger period and what the district endorsement process will look like, including ensuring the awareness training available to the wider membership continues to adequately prepare and protect members for this critical risk.

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

TRAINER & ASSESSOR DEVELOPMENT

Volunteer representatives have again advocated for our peers at the recent Joint Training Committee, expressing increased concern and frustration over the inconsistent approach to the recognition, training and communication of new and experienced volunteer trainer and assessors (VTAs). VFBV is aware that many VTAs have withdrawn from training and assessing for CFA because of continued lack of communication regarding qualifications and frustration over access to training material handovers and resources. CFA has accepted these concerns and committed to work with regions and districts to ensure that we have a consistent and fair process across the state when it comes to our trusted and relied upon VTAs. VFBV and CFA are also pleased to report that 18 VTAs across multiple districts have been accepted to participate in a dual-diploma course in Vocational Education and Training and/or Training Design and Development. These courses are fully funded as part of a state-wide initiative to upskill and build capacity within our VTA cohort.

VFBV is also happy to report that CFA has recently enacted upon a formal request to provide professional development opportunities to VTAs, with more than a dozen resource materials recently added into LMS. There is an Educator Professional Development tab under Catalogues, which include webinars and pre-recorded videos. Although these recently added materials don't cover all aspects and are digital only, it is a good start and progression to further professional development opportunities for VTAs. As part of the additional development opportunities, CFA has also taken suggestions from the Committee to ensure all professional development undertaken via the LMS will be saved within the system, resulting in members not being required to separately log it as part of their resumes. We encourage all VTAs to provide feedback to CFA on these new opportunities. Regional and district Learning & Development teams are made aware of these updates as they occur and should be providing this information out to all volunteer trainer and assessors.

LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (LMS) UPDATES

Delegates have recently requested additional changes within the Learning Management System (LMS) based on feedback from brigade users. Thank-you to all members that have submitted feedback and suggestions.

The intention of the changes is to make the system more user friendly and minimising the requirements for brigades to continually contact District Offices. One of these improvements includes the ability for brigade and group supervisors to change the priority of a member's self-nomination when approving the nomination. VFBV has also requested the ability for members to have the opportunity to provide times that would best suit the member to conduct the course i.e., normal business hours or weekends, leading to courses being planned and programmed by Districts when it suits the majority of members waiting for the course. VFBV understand that changes in LMS can take some time and will continue to work with CFA to improve the system.

STRUCTURAL FIREFIGHTER

In a good news story for delegates the new proposed Structure Firefighter course which underwent drafting and consultative scoping in 2019 is finally stepping closer to reality after two-years of extensive advocacy by VFBV to pilot and resource the initiative. CFA has reported that South East Region has offered to conduct flexible, block style piloting of the new proposed Structure Firefighter course. South East Region has confirmed that both courses are fully subscribed. It is still intended that North-East Region will pilot the gap training which focus on bridging the gap between Search and Rescue and Structure Firefighting as well as other ancillary equipment including thermal imaging camera operation. VFBV representatives are looking forward to consolidating the feedback from the pilot courses and ensuring that improvements are made to satisfy the end-users, before the program is released to all districts.

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

VOLUNTEER NUMBERS AND RESIGNATIONS

Delegates continue to raise concerns with the sudden decrease in volunteer numbers over the last few years, noting the impacts of government reforms, CFA leadership churn, pandemic mandates, and HR issues all contributing. VFBV continues to flag the significant impact on surge capacity for state-wide emergencies such as the Black Saturday Fires of '09 and the Black Summer Bushfires of '19/20. Delegates are requesting CFA establish focussed programs that utilise available data to actively promote programs that increase the retention rates amongst members, while also acknowledging the value of state-wide respect and recruitment programs. The Committee continues to review data from exit surveys and utilise VFBV's Welfare and Efficiency Survey to review trends and issues.

The committee has requested CFA review the flexible volunteering project in particular, and consider a state-wide media campaign like that run for the Army Reserves, to strengthen recruitment and promote the Volunteer Recruitment Hub. Delegates have cautioned that recruitment alone is not a silver bullet, and focus must also be on retention to ensure that volunteers are encouraged to stay. Key areas of focus suggested have been a reduction in administrative burdens, volunteer respect and professional development opportunities to assist Brigade officers upskill their HR management skills. CFA representatives have confirmed that the CEO and Chief Officer support a focus on retention and delegates look forward to contributing to this work in collaboration with CFA.

YOUTH CADETS

Delegates are pleased with the progression and collaborative approach CFA is taking to develop a pilot program for 16/17 year olds. The aim of the program is to increase participation and retention of 16/17 year olds and encourage junior members to continue to progress to senior membership. Parents and guardians of these members have had the opportunity to opt out of the program which commenced at the end of 2021 and is planned to conclude June 2022. The working group has been developing modules around flexible learning around mental health, adapting to change, FEM, Vegetation Management, community engagement along with advice from delegates regarding practical aspects, visits to field training grounds and possible site visits. Brigades are encouraged to support any young members participating in this pilot program. Once completed a review will be conducted to review how the new program affected retention.

NEM 2019-20 BUSHFIRES

Delegates have continued to monitor the progress of the National Emergency Medal nominations that are being sent to Canberra. Due to the extensive number of medals for the 19/20 Bushfires, nominations have been sent to the Australian Honours Secretariat in batches of 500 with Districts that were most impacted from the fires to be awarded first, followed by successive districts. A working group with Regional Business Managers, VFBV and Headquarters staff has been established to investigate best practice for award ceremonies, particularly with learnings from the '09 NEM presentations. With limited funding available, ceremonies are likely to be region based which will make for challenging logistics. The medal and clasps (for those already awarded the medal) maybe presented by the Governor-General, Governor, MP's, CFA Board Members, CEO, CO or DCO where available. Delegates are seeking further clarification for the attachment of 19/20 Bushfires clasp to members who already hold the medal.

BRIGADE MANAGEMENT MANUAL FEEDBACK

CFA is currently reviewing the brigade management manual together with delegates to ensure that it remains a comprehensive, relevant and up to date manual that is available to members. Any feedback is greatly appreciated, and members should contact your State Councillor, District Council or Committee member with any suggestions. Feedback can also be sent to Mark Dryden via m.dryden@vfbv.com.au

SPECIAL NOTICE

Update your 3rd Dose (BOOSTER) Record



RECORD
YOUR
COVID-19
VACCINATION STATUS



Under the Victorian Health Minister Pandemic Orders - CFA (and all other emergency service organisations) are required to collect, record and hold vaccination information on all members (including CFA & SES volunteers) who are required to perform an activity outside the person's ordinary place of residence - as soon as reasonably practicable.

If you have not yet updated your CFA member record with the date of your third dose (Booster) vaccination – you are encouraged to do so as soon as possible. We would also encourage delegates to encourage their peers, brigades and groups to remind members of this requirement and to help encourage members to record their status. The current order (#5) stipulates this must be done by 12th March 2022.

ONLINE

Members are encouraged to visit <https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/> and input their own status.

PHONE

Members can call (03) 9262 8663 and update their status over the phone between 9am - 9pm seven days a week.