



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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SOP consultation

VFBV and CFA has commenced consultation on a number of SOP's currently under review. Copies of each draft SOP is available via the VFBV website.

VFBV District Councils are now providing the opportunity for all members to review, discuss and provide feedback on CFA's proposed changes. Any comments on suggested improvements or clarifications are welcome, as would any practical limitations or difficulties members may identify. Feedback via email or post would be most preferred, and feedback is welcome from any individual, brigade or group. Feedback will be used by VFBV to provide a formal response to CFA.

Feedback is requested no later than the 15th July 2019.

It would be preferred that members provide feedback ASAP, so that it can be received incrementally, allowing us enough time to consolidate, identify trends and research issues raised by members.

SOP's being reviewed are 5.04 Service Hose Testing and Coupling Inspection; SOP 9.14 Low Voltage Fuse Removal; SOP 9.41 Safe Work at Heights; SOP 10.24 Emergency Medical Response; and SOP 10.27 Train Incidents.

CFA is also proposing to revoke two SOP's - SOP 6.03 Derelict Structures – Burning Of and SOP 9.06 Fire Alarms – Monitoring and Logging of Tests.

Check the website for details.

Provisional Payments Pilot

VFBV has been working with Government on its election commitment for a Provisional Payments pilot. The pilot is part of the Governments Mental Health initiatives and will allow eligible emergency workers (including volunteers) to access payments for medical treatment and services while their compensation claim is being assessed. The pilot will focus on determining claims as quickly as possible, recognising the importance of early intervention.

A Governmental Steering Committee has been established to oversee and guide the pilot in making provisional payments to eligible volunteer emergency workers and it will operate in conjunction with a Steering Committee focused on the in scope paid workforces. The Steering Committee is made up of representatives including AV, CFA, SES, Victoria Police and VFBV. Government agencies are represented on the Committee including the Department of Premier and Cabinet – Justice -Treasury and Health, DELWP, EMV, and Worksafe.

VFBV is represented by CEO Adam Barnett who has reported very positive progress. "I commend the Government on this mental health initiative and see this as an extremely important project to improve early intervention for emergency service volunteers and staff alike. This is a very positive step in helping to remove the stigma around seeking assistance for mental health and providing members with compassionate and accessible options for support," he said.

We will keep you updated on progress.

VOLUNTEER WEEK

It was National Volunteer Week from 20-26 May and VFBV took the opportunity to showcase some of our great volunteer stories. The theme for the week was "making a world of difference" and it was great to see many brigades sharing their stories on Facebook and other media. You can find all these stories on the VFBV website.

On the final day of Volunteer Week, VFBV posted a special thank-you to our VFBV elected representatives across Victoria:

As National Volunteer Week 2019 draws to an end I want to close with a special thanks to the people who do so much to keep CFA brigades and groups connected – our VFBV elected representatives right across Victoria. I can't thank them enough for the additional time and effort they dedicate to improving the welfare and efficiency of CFA brigades, groups and volunteers.

VFBV representatives are conditioned to put others first, whether it be their communities, other brigades, groups or their fellow volunteers. This culture of dedicated and selfless service is a proud tradition of the Association, and one in which we are rightfully proud. And this week's celebration of National Volunteer Week has been no different, thanking and acknowledging the fantastic contributions of CFA volunteers. As the week draws to a close, I thought it fitting to save our last thank-you for all those that contribute directly to VFBV's important work. Whether they are a

VFBV Board Member, State Councillor, District Council Executive or Official, Brigade or Group Delegate, a member of our small staff team or any other volunteers, friends and supporters who contribute behind the scenes – they are what makes our large and diverse VFBV family so wonderful.

Without them, VFBV would be unable to do its work to provide a united voice for volunteers and volunteer brigades and groups. They spend every day - trying to make things better.

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YOU COULD WIN!!

Brigades or Groups that pay VFBV affiliations before 30 June 2019 will automatically go into the draw for a chance to win one of four great prizes!

The 2019/20 Affiliation notices for your Brigade/Group's VFBV affiliation and VFBV Welfare Fund Subscriptions are with your Secretary now with a due date of 30 June 2019.

As a gesture of appreciation to Brigades and Groups that pay VFBV affiliation prior to 30th June, VFBV will automatically place your Brigade or Group into a draw for a chance to win one of these great prizes, kindly donated by GAAM Emergency Products and Powdersafe Pty. Ltd.

As this edition of Fire Wise goes to press, the Government's contentious Fire Services (Reform) Bill is once again making its way through Parliament. Despite the deep concerns raised with the previous Bill, I am sorry to report that this year's Bill is very similar to the previous.

The fate of community safety and CFA, a world-respected and highly successful emergency service, now rests on the checks and balances of the Legislative Council (Upper House), particularly the votes of the cross bench made up of the minor party and independent Members of Parliament who hold the balance of power.

By the time you are reading this, the outcome of the Bill may already be known.

Regardless of the outcome, I am committed to ensuring we come through this torrid chapter in CFA's history stronger and together. History will be the ultimate judge of this chapter and I am immensely proud our organisation has had the integrity to stand up and speak up for what is right.

VFBV continues to respectfully call for evidence to support the Government's case for change, including impact modelling, cost analysis and consultation. This will be the first time in Victoria's history that our fire service legislation has not been through these basic prerequisites. The lack of detail, modelling or analysis is a significant impediment in winning the hearts and minds of volunteers and opens the State up to enormous risk of unintended consequences to what is essentially - critical public policy.

We must keep reminding people we are not opposed to change that improves our fire services in a demonstrable way, and for the benefit of our communities. Just 'hoping' this is the outcome of the proposed changes and crossing our fingers and hoping for the best just simply isn't good enough.

We don't go to a fire and just 'hope' to put it out. We plan; we train; we exercise; we study data and impact modelling; we collect intelligence from the field; and we com-

Nominations for Trust Fund

The VFBV Board is calling for nominations to the CFA and Brigades Donations Trust Fund.

Nominations close Friday 21st June 2019 and can be mailed to VFBV office 9/24 Lakeside Drive, Burwood East 3151 or emailed to vfbv@vfbv.com

REFORM BILL IN PARLIAMENT AGAIN

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

These concepts should not be foreign when it comes to major structural change of our fire services.

Jack Rush QC reminds us of evidence presented to the Bushfires Royal Commission by Professor Leonard from Harvard University, Professor 't Hart former professor of the ANU and now Professor of Public Administration at Utrecht University and Associate Dean of the Netherlands School of Public Administration in The Hague and General Molan former Chief of the Allied Operations in Iraq.

All three warned of the dangers of radical change to organisations, and they drew on evidence of corporate takeovers where over half failed in terms of value creation with many ending up exacerbating rather than erasing tribal identities. Incremental change, they said, often produces far better results than radical change. I can think of no better analogy for what has been presented to us in this Bill.

Throughout the debate, I have heard many slurs on our CFA and the ability of volunteers to provide a world class service to urban communities. I have been saddened that these attacks have gone unanswered by those in positions of authority, and that response time data continues to be manipulated and misrepresented to the Victorian community to try and erode public confidence in CFA and CFA volunteers. Many commentators have unwittingly also criticised our respected career staff operating from the 38 integrated brigades when they say CFA simply isn't up to it.

While much has been made of response times as seemingly one reason for the change, the fact remains that response times today are not based on modern data but have been inherited from outdated modelling and research from the United Kingdom in the 1950s. Targets have not been updated to cater for new building regulations nor the significant improvements to building materials or fire rating construction. Don't just take my word for it, only four years ago, the Victorian Auditor General published his findings in 2015 that the current response time targets are outdated, not based on evidence or a clear rationale. The results of the audit found that current targets do not reflect best practice, optimal service efficiency or improved outcomes and are not appropriate standalone measures. The audit's findings and recommendations from 2015 are amongst the plethora of previous review recommendations that the proposed 'reform' does not address.

Across the world, modern fire services have developed new and improved measures - putting more emphasis on outcome measurements such as loss of life, injury, preparedness and property damage, because these measurements better capture the impact of the whole range of fire service activity, including prevention, preparedness and response. Driving service delivery improvement through the narrow lens of just response

times is not only short sighted but it is also not in the best interests of public safety nor public value.

We all want safe and resilient communities - and a strong and vibrant CFA goes hand in hand with that. And we all want to put public safety at the centre of everything we do. My hope is that one day legislators, agencies and all stakeholders find a way to put their differences aside and collaborate to develop real service improvements that will actually lead to lasting benefits for our communities. I am committed to this - and I know you are too. We will continue to advocate for reforms to be developed collaboratively, openly and most importantly - transparently. Reform that brings people along with it, rather than pits firefighter against firefighter and reform that actually benefits our communities.

NEW CFA CEO APPOINTED

I congratulate Steve Warrington AFSM on being appointed as CFA's new CEO following the departure of Dr Paul Smith. I have worked with Steve over many years and have always appreciated his passion and enthusiasm. I wish him all the best and look forward to working with him in his new role. Combing the CEO role with the Chief Officer role will be a significant challenge for the organisation and will require all of us to lend our support to give this change the best opportunity for success. To this I, and the VFBV Board, are committed.

PRESUMPTIVE LEGISLATION

Recently I represented Victoria at CAVFA (the Council of Australian Volunteer Fire Associations). This national body was established to give volunteer firefighters a united voice in discussions and negotiations with governments and key stakeholders at a national level. These meetings provide a terrific forum for the State volunteer associations to come together and share information and advocate on matters of policy which impact volunteer firefighters across Australia.

It was with mixed emotions I heard the progress of presumptive legislation in the other States and Territories, with NSW recently passing fair and equal presumptive legislation. It is disheartening that Victoria is now the only State in Australia that does not have presumptive legislation for firefighters diagnosed with one of the 12 cancers that have been determined by scientists to be linked to firefighting. It is also sad that while almost all other States have introduced equal legislation that treats paid firefighters and volunteers the same, Victoria is still pursuing legislation that discriminates against volunteers and proposes to treat them differently.

VFBV will continue its campaign for Presumptive Legislation that protects our firefighters and treats volunteers and staff equally. We will continue to campaign against unfair additional barriers and bureaucratic burdens for vol-



unteer firefighters that are not applied to staff claims. We attend the same incidents, face the same risks and breathe the same smoke. Neither cancer nor smoke discriminates on the basis of if someone is paid or not - so neither should the legislation that protects us.

I have seen first hand during our support for a number of sick volunteers who have been forced to navigate arbitrary and bureaucratic barriers and drawn out legal processes only to be denied access to early, simple and compassionate support, and the terrible pain, suffering and heartache this inflicts on a person and their family at a time they are most vulnerable. It's cruel, unfair and we must continue to do everything in our power to bring about change.

This isn't just theoretical. Today, there are sick firefighters who need our help. People like CFA volunteer Rob Gibbs who has had to fight not only the cancer ravaging his body, but the bureaucrats and lawyers as well. At a time when he should be spending precious time with his family and concentrating on his health - he has had to deal with layer after layer of red tape, uncertainty and delays.

We must remove the proposed additional barriers that will only apply to volunteer firefighters. This is a moral issue - and one which we need to call out and stand up for. I call on all political parties, stakeholders and CFA members to unite on this most important issue and work together to deliver the presumptive legislation that Victorian firefighters deserve. Legislation that is fair and compassionate and that treats all firefighters equally and with respect. Victorian firefighters deserve no less.

LOOK AFTER EACH OTHER

I want to acknowledge how hard the last couple of years has been for you. I understand many of you are feeling disappointed and angry. Everyone is different and their reactions to potentially traumatic or stressful events will be different. Please look after yourselves and each other. Respect different opinions and viewpoints and offer your fellow members patience, empathy and solidarity as we move through this journey together.

The CFA Wellbeing Support Line is available 24/7 and can be reached on 1800 959 232. These services are available to all CFA members and their immediate families at no charge.