



8 January 2010

Dear Editor

Recent headlines (“Telephone warning alert system a farce”, 6 January) have focused public concern over implementation problems with some of the state’s new measures for the bushfire season. But people need to understand that the CFA and the State Government have already achieved considerable improvements since last year.

The CFA would be the first to recognise that there is work to do on perfecting the new systems. It has been working hard since last season, but with the magnitude of the many changes to be made, it is only to be expected that some of those changes are going to experience teething problems.

But Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria, which represents the state’s 60,000 CFA volunteers, would like to put those concerns into perspective.

The mainstay of Victoria’s response to fire is already in place, well tested and ready for action. CFA volunteers are trained to professional standards with TAFE-equivalent qualifications. They are experienced and dedicated, as they have demonstrated year after year.

Victoria’s 1,200 CFA brigades serve country Victoria and more than half of Melbourne. Volunteers have been doing what they always do, providing year-round emergency services, fighting house fires, dealing with car accidents and hazardous materials incidents, and conducting rescue work.

With the bushfire season under way, tens of thousands of frontline volunteers, with their familiar tankers, pumpers and yellow overalls, are on call now, just as they were last summer.

The volunteers are at a heightened state of readiness, and on hot days, brigades across the state have volunteer crews on standby just a few steps from their tankers and ready to be on the road in seconds. Thousands of volunteers have their kit bags packed and are ready at a minute’s notice to be dispatched as members of the strike teams that deal with large scale fires anywhere in the state.

There is, of course, one positive aspect to the public’s heightened awareness of fire – more Victorians are realising that every one of us has a role to play.

It is not too late for every Victorian householder to take action now, preparing their property and making a simple plan to enact in advance of high risk conditions in their area or should fire threaten their community.

Any CFA volunteer can tell you that the best fire fighting starts long before the first smoke appears, and the time to start is now. The bushfire season is here and CFA volunteers are ready, as all Victorians should be.

Sincerely

Andrew Ford
Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria