

VFBV QUARTERLY SUPPLEMENT



Welcome to the December 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 and get involved.

Adam Barnett
CEO, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria

Additional Resources and Updates Available Electronically

COVID-19 Financial Support Resources	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-supp11
CFA External Review of Culture	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-supp24
FEM Health Surveillance Program	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-supp25

VFBV Quarterly Supplement Enclosures

Your December enclosures include:	Action Required:
1. This year's VFBV Welfare & Efficiency survey is now open	Please table and note
2. Editorial: Appreciating those who inspire	Please table and note
3. Update your CFA Member Record	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard
4. Editorial: Culture, Respect and Vaccines	Please table and note
5. 2 Minute Briefings (Joint Committee's)	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard



VFBV | VOLUNTEER FIRE
BRIGADES VICTORIA

2021/22

VFBV Volunteer Welfare & Efficiency Survey



This year's VFBV Volunteer Welfare & Efficiency survey is now open.

Be part of improving CFA, and help us make a difference.



Visit the VFBV website or scan the QR
code to start the survey today.
www.vfbv.com.au



LAST YEAR
2693
CFA VOLUNTEERS
PARTICIPATED

Appreciating those who inspire

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Published: 'Fire Wise' November 2021 and adapted for VFBV Quarterly Supplement

All year I have tried to avoid referencing any COVID restriction milestones. Mostly because they change so quickly, and the information becomes outdated almost by the time it is printed. So it is with some caution, but also in acknowledgment of its significance that, at the time of writing – Victoria is due to properly exit lockdown #6, with the significant dropping of restrictions after hitting the 80 per cent vaccination targets.

Removal of the regional/metro border, a return to home gatherings and family visits, the removal of the nightly curfew and a transition to the full opening up of retail, hospitality, community sport, entertainment and events.

Hopefully, all this marking our first tentative steps towards the long promised COVID-normal.

And after more than 262 days of COVID shutdown measures, Victorians have more than truly earned it. But to paraphrase a famous 90s Broadway show: How do you measure a year? In sunrises, sunsets, in truths learned or bridges burned - inches, miles travelled or perhaps in 525,600 minutes or moments with friends?

I, like many of you, am really looking forward to reconnecting with our people. Fire brigade has always been about people. There is only so much screen time one can endure with endless video conferences and speaking with the floating heads.

Enjoy reconnecting with your friends, family and your brigade peers and make sure you take the time to allow your mind to acclimate. Take it easy and give yourself some extra care. It's been a while, and as creatures of habit the changes can be a little unsettling as we all adjust. For brigades, just be mindful that not everyone will want to spring back to how things were all at the same time, so please be tolerant and flexible as people find their rhythm. Advice and guidance on COVIDSafe practices for brigade/group activities and events can be found on Brigades Online, on the COVID landing page of the CFA website. We have also emailed copies of this advice to all VFBV District Councils and State Councillors who are

more than happy to assist should you need some additional advice.

VACCINATION STATUS

Following up from the most recent CHO directions, could I please encourage members to record their vaccination status on their CFA member record. There is now a legal obligation for CFA to collect and store whether you are single dosed, double dosed, unvaccinated or are an excepted person. I appreciate in an organisation the size of CFA this is going to take some time, and with this in mind the call centre has recently extended its hours to assist members who may not be tech savvy and need some help.

Recording your status is quick and simple. The two easiest ways is either do it yourself online via the members area www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au or you can do it over the phone by calling (03) 9262 8663.

The phone option is available Mon – Fri between 8am to 8pm and on Saturdays and Sundays between 9am and 1pm.

EXTERNAL REVIEW

As you would recall, last month I spoke of the external review commissioned by CFA and led by the former Commissioner of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission Dr Helen Szoke AO. This is an external review into the culture and issues management processes of the CFA.

I have since met with Helen and the review team from Allen & Clarke on a number of occasions and have been impressed with their approach. The team is very eager to interview and speak with any volunteers or staff that wish to contribute to their review.





The team is exploring a range of topics but is keen to hear from people on the behavioural and cultural expectations members have of the organisation, how effectively and efficiently issues are managed when they do arise, how members and leaders are supported to work through these issues, and the organisations approach to promoting diversity. These questions apply as much to our brigades and groups as they do to our Districts/Regions and headquarters.

I want to encourage all members to contribute to this work. By being an external review, you will be able to contribute privately and in a safe environment by way of one-on-one interviews or via focus groups should you prefer.

I urge anyone who has recently been involved in a discipline or conflict matter to get in touch with the team and share your experience of the process. This will be one of the most effective ways to highlight the systemic and procedural issues that members have raised with VFBV over the years. And while we will continue strongly advocating for improvements to remedy the imbalance of power that often presents in these kinds of cases, as well as improvements to procedural fairness and the timely resolution of matters – your personal experiences and stories will be the fabric that fills out and colours in the outlines of our advocacy.

I also want to encourage members with positive stories and good experiences to come forward and speak with the review team also. I come across so many inspiring stories of how brigades and groups have worked hard to remove gender barriers or attract more diverse community members to join their brigade. These stories deserve to be told and shared so we can all learn from them. These success stories will enable the review to model recommendations around examples that have been demonstrated to work in the CFA context and will provide inspiration for others.

We have made the review team's Discussion Paper available via our website, along with their consultation schedule over the next six weeks. The review team will be visiting almost 40 locations spread across the whole State to enable an opportunity for members to meet the team one-one as close to home as possible.

If you are interested in speaking with the review team, and

want to arrange an interview please email them directly via CFAreview@allenandclarke.com.au

Interviews can be face to face, over the phone, via video conference or part of a group. Your details will remain private and confidential and I would again encourage members to reach out. This is your chance to contribute to the CFA of the future.

SPIRIT OF CFA AWARDS

Nominations for the Spirit of CFA awards closed on the 30 November 2021.

And while volunteers are humble and don't seek the attention from their actions they do for their communities, could I please impress on you how important it is to encourage and recognise members who are making a valuable contribution, through either these kind of awards, or nominations for the AFSM.

With COVID hitting the last two years very heavily, think about the actions taken by members in your brigade or group who have really made a difference, no matter how big or small. It can be such a confidence boost for a member just being nominated for an award, so please think about those people who have really stepped up in some way over the last couple of years.

So please – take the time to nominate someone that's made a difference to you or your community. We should all aim to be generous with our praise and appreciation for those people in our lives who inspire us. Including the quiet achievers. Think of those amongst us that have never been ones to shout their achievements from the rooftops, but still make an incredible impact on the people around them. People that are generous with their praise, empathy and time to encourage or support others. The introverts that hum away in the background and are just getting on with things, as well as those that lead in the spotlight.

Last but by no means least, with a fast-approaching fire season on our doorstep, please take time to enjoy the easing of restrictions. Reenergise and recuperate and enjoy reconnecting with your friends, peers and loved ones. You've deserved every minute of it. Stay safe.

SPECIAL NOTICE

Update your CFA Member Record



RECORD
YOUR

COVID-19
VACCINATION STATUS



Under the Victorian Chief Health Officer Directions - CFA (and all other emergency service organisation) are required to collect, record and hold vaccination information on all members (incl volunteers) who may be required to perform an activity outside the person's ordinary place of residence as soon as reasonably practicable.

If you have not yet provided CFA your vaccination status – 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.

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.

Culture, Respect and Vaccines

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Published: 'Fire Wise' October 2021 and adapted for VFBV Quarterly Supplement

Back in October the Premier announced new mandatory directions issued by the Chief Health Officer (CHO) requiring all authorised workers to be vaccinated to continue working onsite. CFA volunteers are included in the definition of authorised workers. The orders are estimated to cover up to 1.2 million Victorian workers, and they apply across our whole emergency management sector including Police, Ambulance, SES and Fire.

The orders require that for authorised workers to attend their work location, or in our case a CFA location or fire-ground - they will need to have had their first vaccine dose by 15 October, and second dose by the 26 November.

The directions further direct that CFA must as soon as reasonably practicable collect, record and hold vaccination information about its members. If CFA does not hold vaccination information about a member – they are required under the direction to treat that member as if they are unvaccinated.

To comply with the CHO directions, the Chief Officer has released a Standing Order that require all members to comply with any lawful direction issued by the CHO and instructing members to record their vaccination status on their member record. As at the 26 November, any member wishing to undertake CFA activities outside of their ordinary place of residence must now be fully vaccinated or have proof of a valid exemption. Unvaccinated members will not be able to respond, attend the fire station, or a face-to-face training course, or a face-to-face meeting while these orders are in effect.

CFA and VFBV's main focus have been on ensuring that we still have sufficient capability left within the emergency management sector to continue dealing with the already increased tempo in operational response as we move into the fire danger period and support members to record their status.

And while VFBV strongly encourages vaccination and believes the expert medical advice that the vaccines are safe and effective - as a representative body we also have an obligation to support all members, including those that consider themselves unsure or unwilling to access vaccination.

For these members, we will continue exploring and considering options on how you can best be safely supported during the pandemic, but for now you will need to remain away from your brigade. Your service and experience are still very much respected, and we would urge you to not simply resign or walk away.



We urge Brigades to take a patient, tolerant and respectful position towards members who may need to take a short break from their CFA duties until the health settings stabilise and the Victorian roadmap is fully activated over the next few months. Similarly, we expect unvaccinated members to respect that this is not a CFA or Brigade decision and is the law.

If you have not yet provided CFA your vaccination status – 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.

Members are encouraged to visit <https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/> and input their own status, or if you don't have computer access, you can call (03) 9262 8663 and update your status over the phone.

UNION CAMPAIGN

Unsurprising, there have been many enquiries from members concerned at the firefighter union's most recent media campaign that started a couple of weeks ago.

Concerns raised with VFBV include; the false insinuation that CFA brigades provide a less service than their FRV counterparts; the misappropriation of the agency brand to try and trick the community into thinking it is an official agency campaign; undermining community safety messaging that Victorian's must plan for their own safety; attempting to influence an independent panel formed by the government's own fire service reforms apparently de-



designed to take politicisation out of boundary reviews and the terrible perpetuation of gender and diversity stereotypes that the fire services are collectively trying so hard to address. Where do you start?

We work in a sector that is built on teamwork, professionalism and respect for the skills that each emergency agency and individual member brings to the incident. We rely on each other and depend on the mutual respect we have for each other to get the job done.

For any member of the emergency management fraternity to carry on and thumb their nose towards any other agency, partner or individual is just so incredibly disappointing. And this follows the unprovoked attacks on our fellow SES volunteers just a couple of months ago. To risk relationships, morale and the reputation of our entire sector just to pursue your own industrial agenda and belligerent expansion is incredibly selfish.

At a time when our fellow frontline health workers are doing everything they can to manage our health system, police have the unenviable task of enforcement, paramedics are heroically dealing with a health system pushed to its limits and nurses are tirelessly working double and triple shifts to cover unprecedented demand - it really is just so distasteful to even contemplate that someone thinks its ok to prance around with a self-serving 'look at moi' campaign in the midst of an ongoing health emergency.

VFBV will always stand up for our volunteers and will always defend you from those that wish to denigrate or insult the selfless work you do. But by the same token, we are not going to make this a race to the bottom. To mount some kind of public attack response in reaction only gives the campaign credibility and sends the message that this kind of behaviour is acceptable across the emergency management sector. It isn't. And we are not going to be a part of any such campaign or tactics that attempts to denigrate our fellow emergency service personnel or agencies.

We will pursue Government and agencies for a public campaign to provide confidence to communities in their volunteer fire services, and we will do so honestly and respectfully without feeling the need to criticise others. For the record, VFBV respects every other emergency service agency that we work with and alongside. We respect each individual that works within our sector, and we respect and are proud of our career firefighters and our

partner fire services and agencies— Fire Rescue Victoria and Forest Fire Management Victoria.

The best thing you can each do is treat the campaign with the contempt it deserves and just ignore it. As far as I'm concerned, it's an own goal and reflects poorly on anyone who wants to defend or minimise the offence taken by it. To my fellow volunteers, please don't let this campaign impact your friendships and respectful relationships with your local career firefighters. We have received just as many calls of concern from them as we have from volunteers. The union wants you to be mistrusting of each other, they mine that cynicism and sow those seeds of fear to try and portray us at each other's throats to rally their troops to whatever the latest campaign is. The public has never questioned your professionalism, and the best way you can prove it is to hold your heads high, keep performing the incredible work you are already doing and continue to model what it really means to be a true professional within our emergency management sector. We strive to be inclusive, respectful and diverse. Professionalism describes a person's conduct, skill, competence, values and qualities. The existence of a pay cheque simply proves you are paid - not whether you are professional or not.

CULTURE REVIEW

VFBV has welcomed the announcement by CFA of the commissioning of Dr Szoke to help lead a review into how to further strengthen CFA's systems and approaches to ensure CFA becomes the exemplar of healthy, safe and respectful workplaces across the fire sector.

We are fully supportive of this review, and the concept has been the subject of much discussion for some time now. As you would be aware through previous comms, the VFBV Board and State Council have both been advocating very strongly in trying to resolve the VEOHRC impasse and improve and strengthen CFA process regarding complaint management and ensuring all our workplaces are safe and respectful.

This review will give CFA a solid baseline and framework to strengthen and support the vital goal of promoting diversity and ensuring all our members feel safe and have access to robust systems of accountability. A fire service where victims are supported, and all members are encouraged to speak up about the importance of a safe and respectful workplace.



VFBV | VOLUNTEER FIRE
BRIGADES VICTORIA

2 Minute Briefings December 2021

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.

2 Minute Briefing

Joint Communications and Technology

December 2021

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

RESPONSE REVIEW PROJECT UPDATE

Delegates have been pleased to learn that the response review project has progressed, with final sign-off by the Chief Officer on the new guiding principles and brigade authorisation process for changes made to brigade response and escalation tables. Members would recall this project started back in 2017 and was established to review the operating models for brigade response and escalation tables, drafting of guiding principles to assist with planning and updates, road modelling to assist with response calculation and processes to provide better consistency across Regions and Districts.

VFBV advocated very strongly for improved brigade authorisation processes, to ensure mandatory brigade and group consultation was done, documented and recorded prior to any changes being submitted to ESTA. CFA have now approved these processes, and a robust process is now in place to ensure local knowledge and consultation occurs early in the process. The data modelling that is used to provide recommendations and baselines for optimal response and escalation tables utilises gazetted roads to guide response planning. The data does not consider things like brigade or vehicle limitations, non-gazetted roads or District boundaries. Hence why consultation with the brigade and group is so critical to ensure the most appropriate and efficient routes are used when developing brigade response and escalation tables. The data can also only provide an average response time taken to get to all parts of the relevant assignment area for all surrounding brigades that is based on the previous 12 months code 1 response data, therefore requiring brigade oversight and input.

Regional and District briefings are underway to train local catchment teams on the new process and systems, and documentation is being prepared to assist brigades and groups understand how they work and how the new brigade authorisation process will operate. We will keep you informed of progress.

MEMBERS PORTAL CONSULTATION

Following the Committee's previous concern that changes were being made to the CFA members portal with no volunteer engagement or consultation, the CFA Communications and Engagement manager has now met with the Committee to discuss and seek feedback on the next phase of planned changes. The most significant change being an improvement to role-based profiles and templates across the members portal to assist Group Officers and Captains. The intent is to provide more granular access to CFA systems with the ability to delegate certain access to other brigade members based on roles, that can then be linked and automated to LMS for when election changes occur. Delegates are also advocating for improvements to the portals search capability and results to address consistent volunteer feedback that locating up-to-date and relevant information can at times be very challenging and difficult.

MICROSOFT OFFICE 365 ACCOUNTS

Joint Committee delegates together with the CFA are commencing work on better utilisation of the Microsoft 365 platform, especially for role-based email addresses. It is proposed this would be automatically driven by the member status changes at the time of elections. For example, when a person is elected Captain effective 1st July 2021, computer smarts would automatically populate the generic captain email address details ensuring that any emails forwarded to the role-based email address of Captain would be automatically sent to the newly elected Captain.

A working party is being established to develop the best system suitable for all CFA members to ensure the correct person always receives the appropriate email for that position rather than everyone needing to alter their email addresses as currently required whenever a member takes on a new position.

As more information becomes available the working party will seek broader feedback from the membership on proposed changes.

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

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

VFBV has welcomed and supported a CFA proposal to make the CFA Community Engagement e-newsletter available to volunteer members who deliver community education. The newsletter is currently only produced for CFA staff who are directly involved in community education delivery.

Discussions have continued between VFBV Delegates and CFA through the committee to broaden the reach and adapt it to become more 'volunteer centric' to assist brigade and group community safety coordinators in particular. It was agreed that the CE Newsletter will be available to members via an opt-in subscription method, enabling volunteer members to sign up if they are interested and alternatively un-subscribe if they no longer have the CE portfolio in their brigade. It is expected the newsletter will be published online every 3 months. VFBV will promote the link as soon as it is available.

E-LEARNING MODULE

Delegates have worked with CFA during a workshop activity aimed at providing members with a base-level understanding of a Community Engagement e-learning package under development for those interested in Community Engagement (CE). The e-learning module is proposed to be a short (less than an hour) package to give members the skills, knowledge and ability to undertake CE activities with greater confidence. It is expected to provide members with an understanding of what Community Engagement means for CFA and why it is important, what is CFA's approach to Community Engagement and to provide people with the tools to support brigade community engagement activities. The framework is expected to be on three levels, Introductory, Intermediate and Advanced and will be made available to members on the CFA Community Engagement content portal through the LMS system. Delegates have asked CFA to provide updates regularly as the package is finalized and have requested to be involved in the module testing and design.

PROPOSED MOU WITH FRV

CFA and FRV are currently in initial discussions for a Community Engagement Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU is intended to provide a clear understanding on the capability of each agency to undertake the vital community engagement role. The MOU aims to give a clear understanding between the two agencies of their roles and responsibilities, the communication process for planning and delivery, agreements on how to manage reporting as well as quick resolutions to any disputes with may occur for areas covered by dual CFA/FRV areas.

Delegates are pleased to hear that the desired outcome for the MOU is to give brigades a clear understanding of how they will be able to continue to deliver their engagement and safety programs to their local communities while working in conjunction with Fire Rescue Victoria. CFA has committed to consult with brigades, committee members, VFBV and any other key stakeholders before the final memorandum document is agreed to.

SMOKE ALARM RESEARCH

The Committee continues to discuss and keep abreast of current smoke alarm research that has shown that the presence of a working smoke alarm in the home is widely considered to be a crucial factor in reducing harm from preventable residential fires. Alarmingly, current research indicates almost a third of homes still do not have a working smoke alarm. CFA is working with the Behavioural Insights team to publish research into smoke alarms in the residential environment. The report has detailed 4 recommendations aimed at targeting behaviours and barriers that influence household decisions with smoke detectors. Recommendations have included that CFA should support the provision of installation and maintenance programs to vulnerable households, then implement behavioural change through targeted advertising campaigns, with clear messaging on the benefits and ease of having interconnected smoke alarms. Delegates have supported the recommendations, and CFA have advised they will adopt the report and begin implementation.

2 Minute Briefing

Joint Equipment & Infrastructure

December 2021

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

PRODUCTION DELAYS IMPACTING FLEET AND EQUIPMENT BUILDS

The Committee was given a frank and honest update from the CFA Engineering team about how COVID-19 impacts not just from local lockdowns and restrictions, but also from worldwide supply chain impacts that are affecting the production of appliances and the supply of equipment. The base pricing of all materials has risen dramatically over the past 12 months, with raw materials such as steel, aluminium and plastic have risen sharply. Some materials have seen a price increase of over 30%. However, that is just the beginning of the production delays, even at these inflated prices delivery of these materials as well as the basic European cab chassis which previously could be delivered in 3 months, is now taking 12 months or more. There are also worldwide shortages of electronic sub-components that are used in many electronic items like key fobs, engine controls panels and other electronic componentry. Added to the woes that we are all experiencing is the inability for manufacturers to work with a full contingent of staff, people working from home as well as density restrictions that are restricting the amount of time and workhours that can be achieved to complete builds and the opportunities for CFA engineers to monitor progress of each appliance with on-site visits reduced or stopped altogether. Each of these issues by themselves would not normally have too much effect on the business of appliance builds however, combined they are impacting the delivery of our appliances and other equipment dramatically. The Committee will continue to monitor and have encouraged CFA to seek every avenue possible to try and mitigate these delays.

CAFS (COMPRESSED AIR FOAM SYSTEM) TANKER UPDATE

In our June 2-minute briefings there was a short update on the progress of several CFA appliances being built or planned for the future. We can now give further information about the production of the proposed Compressed Air Foam System (CAFS) Tanker. CFA's CAFS capability currently sits with 2 heavy tankers retrofitted with a Compressed Air Foam System and were commissioned after the 2014 Hazelwood Coal Mine Fires to help mitigate the risk associated with the power industry in the Latrobe Valley. These appliances have been used across the state for various fires including the Somerton tip fire in 2015 and the St Patricks day peat fires in the South West in 2017 where large amounts of foam have assisted in keeping the fires under control and reducing the amount of smoke that is released into nearby communities. On these occasions the CAFS capability came from the Tasmanian Fire Service and the ACT fire service providing vehicles to assist. A small working party have been working on the terms of reference and the discussions around the role statement for a purpose built CAFS Tanker with 8000ltr water capacity. The Tasmania Fire Service have a large CAFS tanker already in operation and the working party have been able to closely study this appliance with a view of improving on the capability of this truck. Due to COVID restrictions the project is moving slowly, however the working party is progressing towards finalizing the design shortly.

TOWING A BRIGADE TRAILER VIDEO

As members would recall from previous briefings, delegates have identified through safety reports and a state-wide audit that a number of brigade trailers require either replacement or maintenance. One issue highlighted during further investigation has been the lack of an easy to understand and simple package on how to hitch and tow a trailer safely. A 15-minute CFA Trailer Safety video has now been produced to assist members to understand how to undertake a safety check on a trailer, how to correctly hitch a trailer and what to look for to ensure your towing vehicle is capable of safely towing a trailer.

Operations Bulletin 004/2021 Trailer Safety is available online and should be read in conjunction with the Tow a Trailer Handbook to ensure members are aware of what to look for when hitching and towing a trailer.

The Tow a Trailer video is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zAdx0k5zZGY> and is a great training guide for members.

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

MEDICAL STAND DOWNS

VFBV continues to advocate strongly for volunteers 'stood down' from full firefighting duties, as a result of a medical condition that the volunteers own treating doctors believe not to significantly increase their risk of illness or injury. During VFBV investigations it has been found that in some cases, neither CFA nor the CFA medical provider had consulted with the volunteer's treating doctors and specialists.

According to AFAC Guidelines, further assessment of the individual would be expected, with either reference to the individual's treating doctor, specialist, or a duly constituted medical panel which would include the treating doctor or specialist and an independent medical specialist.

As a result of further discussions between VFBV and CFA, CFA has met with its medical provider and agreed to a number of actions including: -

- The medical provider will now liaise with the member's treating doctor(s) (General Practitioner and/or specialist)
 - o Discuss the member's medical history, current health status and to seek results of tests etc.
 - o Discuss the case with the treating doctor(s) in relation to firefighting, including an explanation as to why the member may/may not be cleared for firefighting to ensure all parties are on the same page.
 - o Contact to treating doctor(s) should be made via phone. If no response within 10 business days, note this on the member's file and proceed with review.

VFBV would encourage volunteers medically stood down, to ensure they and their treating doctors/specialists are contacted directly by and engaged throughout the process. If this fails to occur, volunteers should alert the CFA Health Surveillance Unit at Burwood and advise VFBV once this has been done for follow-up.

In related news, a literary review of the AFAC guidelines and international guidelines has commenced. The Committee was advised that CFA has established a working group of ACFOs and Commanders and have met once. Delegates have requested volunteers be consulted and form part of this working group. VFBV will continue to seek the participation of volunteers on this working group and will advise of progress.

The Committee continues to monitor the Volunteer Leadership Development project which is being led by CFA's People and Culture team and is a five-year initiative which commenced scoping in 2020 and is funded by the Donations Trust.

VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Delegates have expressed disappointment in the lack of progress, with CFA advising that due to changeover of staff and other issues, progress on the initiative has been slow. CFA advised that although there are pressing immediate needs that require a response, long term the program needs to be established to ensure it is sustainable and relevant. CFA has acknowledged that a number of issues affecting brigade leadership and BMT's does require a more urgent approach and has agreed with delegates that this work needs to be progresses as quickly as possible.

Delegates have pointed out that this initiative has been running for 18 months and given the upcoming fire season, could potentially be delayed further. With CFA's decision to stop offering previous programs such as the popular Fire-line leadership program, and VFBV's Cert IV leadership scholarships that were previously supported by the Valuing Volunteers grants - this effectively means that very little formal leadership training has been offered to volunteers since 2018.

Delegates have requested CFA consider existing training packages and programs that have been very successful in the past and could potentially be utilised in the interim. VFBV will continue discussions with CFA.

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

FIREGROUND TABARD PROGRESS

As members would recall, VFBV has been pursuing CFA for many, many years to implement the outcomes from the EMV State review of fireground tabards. This work was initiated by the inaugural Fire Services Commissioner back in 2012, and recommended updates to ensure consistency across agencies and ensure incident management teams and fire ground leaders in the field were easily recognized during an incident.

While this has been a lengthy process due to the complexity of ensuring all emergency management agencies operate under the one set of incident management protocols, VFBV is encouraged that CFA has finally reported that the new style tabards are now being distributed to brigades and groups. One set is being issued to every appliance but are also available from the State Logistics Centre if brigades or groups would like to purchase additional sets. The tabards are made from a fire-resistant material and meet Australian Standards and have interchangeable role titles attached with velcro strips. If your brigade has not yet received a set of tabards, please direct enquiries to your District office in the first instance.

ALTERNATIVE ENERGY DOCTRINE

Delegates to the Joint Operations Committee have been requesting CFA to review its alternative energy doctrine with the view to provide members with more information and training on incidents involving hybrid and alternative fuel vehicles and alternate energy sources. While there is some information available from the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and international firefighting agencies - there is very little specific to Australian conditions.

Noting that CFA and FRNSW chair a monthly meeting with the National Alternative Energy Doctrine Group to discuss and share information about alternative energy systems, VFBV has requested CFA lead discussion on the increased risks posed for first responders given the increasing use and popularity of alternate energy.

In the interim, members are directed to the set of Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) Guidelines issued by CFA in November 2020 which outline safety requirements when undertaking operational activities involving BESS. Work is also being done on a Hybrid Vehicle SOP, guidelines and a charging station guideline. Delegates will continue to monitor and advocate for more research in this area.

SEASONAL UPDATE

The seasonal outlook for Victoria has identified the potential for a wetter summer period. While most of the state has experienced a wetter than average winter there are parts of the Northwest in particular where pasture is drying rapidly. The Chief Officer has requested all brigades to ensure they are fire ready by ensuring all members have completed minimum skills, participated in the annual mandatory 'burn over drill', and their tree hazard awareness qualification is up to date.

As it is likely that COVID protocols will continue over all of summer, brigade management teams need to ensure all members are aware of the limitations they may face and the restrictions that may apply. Members are also reminded of the personal preparedness steps they can individually undertake to ensure they are ready to tackle the busy fire danger period.

Before engaging in any fire related business, members are reminded to check their PPE and replace any items that may be unsafe, be physically prepared by staying fit and drinking lots of water and finally be very aware of your fatigue levels before attending a callout. It is critically important we look out for each other and ensure everyone comes home safe.

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

GENERAL FIREFIGHTER EDITION 2 UPDATE

The General Firefighter (GFF) program has recently undergone an edition 2 update with the materials being brought into line with recent updates to national standards and governance requirements. While this change only affects Trainer and Assessors who deliver the program, we highly encourage everyone, from individuals, Brigades and Trainer and Assessors to supply CFA with feedback, both negative and positive to ensure that future updates encompass the needs of the membership. When GFF was released in 2020, CFA made a firm commitment to VFBV that there would be a formal 12-month review of the program with required updates to be made and added in to improve delivery of the course, support resources and materials while engaging in consultation with VFBV and the membership. VFBV has just completed the consultation of the digital eLearning for GFF which is envisaged to give members another format and ability to complete their theory in a self-paced setting. The new eLearning package is now available through LMS. Feedback or comments on GFF can be emailed to CFA training@cfa.vic.gov.au or VFBV c.dent@vfbv.com.au

FIRST AID TRAINING

VFBV has been receiving many concerns and complaints lately in relation to the confusing and puzzling pathway to gaining First Aid and related training, both from an acquisition perspective and re-accreditation. VFBV recently raised these issues directly with CFA and were able to ascertain that many of these issues are due to complexities between CFA and St John's Ambulance systems or communication breakdown between CFA departments. While Districts are wholly responsible for the scheduling of all face-to-face first aid and advanced resuscitation courses in their respective Districts, the State First Aid Coordinator is responsible for coordinating and scheduling the blended option of courses which allows members to conduct the theory component online in a self-paced environment and only needing to attend a practical session of approximately 4hrs. It has also been suggested that due to COVID-19 restrictions and inability to meet demands, the Specialist Response Officer will take on the responsibility of ensuring EMR and RAR Brigades receive their respective levels of first aid training. This is why the various options appear so confusing to members trying to book their First Aid training through LMS. Delegates are requesting CFA simplify and streamline the process.

The Committee is also continuing to review feedback from health professionals who are still reporting difficulties in having their external qualifications accepted by CFA. CFA has committed to refining this process to make it easier and more streamlined to assist those going through an RPL (recognition of prior learning) process.

LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM CHANGES

VFBV representatives continue to raise members concerns with the LMS (Learning Management System) and advocate for additional fixes to improve the system and make it more user friendly for the end user. CFA has listened and responded to these concerns and following consultation with delegates on the Joint Training Committee have recently released a short but simple LMS Navigation training package which can be found on the home screen of LMS.

CFA is in the process of developing further modules with specific subjects to help the membership understand the system and promote the many functions that are included, but not always intuitive. VFBV and CFA have scheduled regular meetings to discuss and implement additional changes such as the ability to nominate preferred times to do a course (i.e. during business hours or weekends) when expressing interest in courses. This is hoped that it will help identify when best to schedule courses in specific locations that are going to suit the membership in each area.

VFBV wants to hear from members on what further changes you'd like to see made to the LMS to ensure its useability moving forward. Feedback can be fed through District Councils or emailed to the Joint Training Committee via c.dent@vfbv.com.au

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

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT HUB

The Volunteer Recruitment Hub is a one stop online system to streamline and automate the registration process for new members from the initial expression of interest to the registering as a member of a Brigade. The Volunteer Recruitment Hub was previously called the Volunteer Onboarding Platform, with the change of name made to reflect its functionality and purpose more accurately. The new online expression of interest page is now available on the CFA public site.

Addressing concerns frequently raised by volunteers about the time taken for a member to be registered, the new system has been designed to improve privacy and facilitate the faster processing of applications. Delegates have raised concerns with the system being solely online and emphasised that some applicants and areas of the state still have limited or no access to the internet. CFA has acknowledged these concerns and have assured delegates that reasonable support will be provided throughout the entire process by CFA support staff to ensure that there are no barriers to the process at any stage. This may include BASOs or other staff assisting applicants with their applications. Delegates have been pleased with the high level of collaboration with the CFA project team.

An introduction booklet is being developed to be sent out to the applicant once their application is approved for registration. The intent of the booklet is to provide the basic information about CFA, the role and the registration process to the applicant and will ensure consistency in the information that goes out to the applicant. A steering committee has also been formed with representatives from regions and various departments along with VFBV delegates to review and recommend changes to the current policies around Volunteer recruitment. The committee is currently reviewing criminal record checks, especially policies around applicants who are found to have a negative outcome in their police checks with a suggestion to have a dedicated Disclosure Officer to review negative outcomes for criminal and WWCC with appeals processes and a multi member panel to review outcomes for consistency.

SERVICE RECORD IMPROVEMENTS REQUEST

VFBV is continuing to progress a request that CFA service records be expanded to facilitate better record keeping and assist in having a more detailed service record for members. Delegates have been working with CFA to progress which positions, roles and awards should be expanded to recognise and better reflect a member's contribution. CFA service areas such as DPC member, special purpose committees (both CFA and VFBV) and other awards including Brigade Life Membership, VFBV Gold Star Award, other Association awards and Brigade/Group awards are being listed. This will help to facilitate recording a member's service history and could also be utilised for nomination of awards such as AFSM, Order of Australia, National Medal, Spirit of CFA, etc. Delegates will continue to develop this list and early discussions indicate that these improvements may be possible via a simple CFA IT upgrade with further work continuing to explore options together with the Joint Communications and Technology Committee.

VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION EVENTS

Delegates have continued to raise concerns and lack of progression relating to how CFA advertise volunteer access to public events such as the Australian Tennis Open, Football matches and the Australia Day parade. VFBV has been pursuing a more open, equitable and transparent process that provides members sufficient opportunities to register and nominate for high profile large events, especially those where spaces are limited. Delegates have expressed concern with the lack of progress and have now put forward their own proposal to ensure a more fair and equitable way to ensure volunteers are aware of the opportunities and process to select members where spaces are limited. The Committee remains keen to work in collaboration with CFA to progress this and will continue to seek CFA support. The proposal by VFBV covers the advertising, application, registration of applicants and a proposed selection process (merit based) designed to ensure a state-wide, common and more equitable process. The Committee will continue to advocate and pursue.



SURVEY NOW OPEN

This year's VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey is now open.

Be part of improving CFA and help us make a difference.

Your views are important. Have your say.



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



LAST YEAR
2693
CFA VOLUNTEERS
PARTICIPATED