

VFBV QUARTERLY SUPPLEMENT



December 2022

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.

On behalf of VFBV, we wish you all a safe and happy Christmas and New Year.

Adam Barnett

CEO, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria.

Additional Resources and Updates Available Electronically

Flood Recovery Resources Fact Sheet	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup36
Volunteer Flood Response Reimbursement	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup35
Successful Volunteer Equipment Grants	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup34

VFBV Quarterly Supplement Enclosures

This month's enclosures include:	Action Required:
1. The annual VFBV Welfare & Efficiency Survey	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard
2. Editorial: Valuable feedback	Please table and note
3. Flood Recovery Fact Sheet	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard
4. Editorial: Flood response and recovery	Please table and note
5. 2 Minute Briefings (Joint Committee's)	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard

Annual Survey



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

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

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

Last year, more than 2,600 volunteers participated. Make your opinion count and take the survey today.

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



VALUABLE FEEDBACK

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

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

Over the last few months, we have been seeking feedback on the ongoing application of the Chief Officer's minimum requirements for operational response. Currently these consist of the successful completion of; minimum skills (now known as general firefighter); an annual entrapment drill, and tree hazard awareness course every three years.

And while State Council is yet to consider the feedback and will do so later this month – the feedback aptly demonstrates how broad and varied our membership, brigades and our operating environments are.

Firstly, I want to thank the hundreds of people who took the time to provide feedback. Close to 400 individual responses on behalf of individuals, brigades, groups and district councils makes for a strong sample size, and a really good mix between districts, brigade classifications and the roles of people submitting feedback that will provide a treasure trove of perspectives.

I continue to be impressed by the generosity and willingness of our people to share their thoughts and experiences. Almost all submissions not only directly answered the questions asked but provided additional comments and reasons on why they felt the way they do.

We notice this same generosity throughout our annual Welfare and Efficiency survey, and the qualitative data collected though the comments are always incredibly informative and useful.

It's what allows us to analyse and interpret the feedback we receive and turn that feedback into valuable guidance and recommendations. Using our own VFBV organisational knowledge and memory, combined with the feedback from the field - we can then provide credible independent advice back to CFA. With senior management demonstrating a renewed commitment to consider and respond to volunteer feedback, the importance of getting involved and being part of the discussions is critical.

The feedback received on the minimum requirements suggest that a large majority of people support the ongoing application of the Chief Officer's minimum requirements, with 69% indicating unqualified support, and only 7% indicating non-support. An additional 21% indicated

support, but also expressed a desire for the requirements to be slightly modified.

When we asked for thoughts on the requirement to conduct an annual entrapment drill, support for the annual requirement rose to 75% support. 11% indicated they would prefer it move to a two-yearly requirement, and 8% advocated for a three yearly requirement.

You may notice the results don't always add up to 100%, and this is because the remainder of responses are covered by either "other" or "I don't know".

Using the qualitative comments, some strong trends in feedback starts to emerge and is extremely useful to provide context to why people have said what they have.

For example, while the majority of submissions strongly supported the importance that the annual entrapment drill plays in our safety culture, there was very strong feedback on ways in which the process could and should be improved.

Top of the list was greater clarity and better consistency in CFA's doctrine, procedures and reporting, so that the obligations are clearly understood and communicated. Equally top of the list was the importance of flexibility and for CFA to provide improved support for brigades and members to then meet any of the requirements.

Suggestions for flexibility included aligning expiry dates and moving away from rigid calendar dates to a more practical window aligned with fire seasons. Requests to trust and empower brigade leaders to deal with individual cases where appropriate, as well as greater support to provide more opportunities for members to access opportunities.

There was very critical feedback expressed on how the new general firefighter program has been rolled out, and widely held perceptions of the time it takes to get new recruits on a course, and the inflexible way some districts have gone about scheduling them.



On the suggestion that CFA should consider an option for the entrapment drill refresher to be conducted via an online package, support dropped to only 21%, with 71% of respondents arguing that the nature of the entrapment drill was best suited for practical completion, and the importance of forming muscle memory through practice and repetition.

However equally important is the feedback provided by those who supported an online package, that will enable us to consider the reasons why people preferred this option, and how improvements might be made to accommodate greater flexibility.

The clearest rejection was reserved for the suggestion that perhaps the requirements and frequency of the minimum requirements could be varied depending on the classification of a brigade. For example, could smaller or quieter class 1 brigades perhaps have the flexibility to conduct them less often?

82% of respondents indicated they did not support the basic requirements being varied, with only 18% supporting the suggestion. While opinions on this question fortified the higher the brigade classification of the individual responding, even 71% of respondents from class 1 brigades did not support a variance.

Again, the qualitative comments provide a plethora of suggestions on how smaller brigades could be better supported in meeting the requirements, with the suggestion that rather than lower the requirements, CFA could instead increase the support for those smaller and quieter brigades that would help them achieve the requirements with less impost on member's time.

The really important point to emerge from the feedback was that while people strongly supported and advocated for greater flexibility, they didn't want this to come disproportionately at the expense of a minimum level or baseline of consistency.

The more difficult proposition of all the options canvassed was the questions around the requirement to undergo the tree hazard awareness package.

Demonstrating the divergence of views, 41% supported the current requirement to complete the package every three years, while 41% advocated that the package should be completed annually along with the entrapment drill.

Within the feedback and comments of those advocating for tree hazard awareness to become an annual requirement, was an equal push that this does not necessarily mean doing the existing package yearly. There is clearly a recognition that the current package was designed to coincide with the introduction of the new national guidelines, and while intended to bring people up-to-speed on all the new changed terms and symbols, moving to an annual refresher provides an opportunity to shorten and simplify the package to be a true "refresher" that is completed frequently while retaining a slightly larger package that might be conducted less frequently (such as every 3 or 5 years) or when there are significant changes or lessons learned.

We will now investigate and research the various opinions and suggestions made, and also consider what further advice to provide the Chief Officer.

Like all things, this isn't simply a matter of 'survey says' and simply parroting how many people indicated answers between binary options. The value of our work will come

from not only understanding the context of the feedback but also the thoughtful and diligent consideration of all the feedback by State Council and other elected volunteer representatives.

They will not only consider the results but will apply a strategic lens across the issues as well as considering practical impacts that may go to the practicability of the arrangements to ensure changes have direct influence on safety outcomes. It should also be stressed that these are minimum requirements, and nothing prevents brigades who believe they operate in higher risk environments, the choice to offer supplementary opportunities for their members.

I frequently quote the popular saying that there are two things you never want to see being made. Sausages and legislation. At times I jest we should perhaps add 'consultation' to this list.

I say that to remind people that genuine consultation isn't simply about asking a question and then waiting upon a single response. It's a journey – not a destination, it takes time and sometimes it is difficult and challenging.

Good consultation is about empowering and trusting volunteers to engage with them as equal partners to consider the issue, challenge or opportunity, and that extends well after an initial response comes back.

Robustness is achieved by the proper analysis of the feedback and then consideration of alternatives; providing timeframes that are respectful and appropriate for a volunteer-based organisation; as well as a commitment to show how feedback has been taken into account and considered before decisions or next steps are taken.

Given the divergence of views on some of the topics, I'll be seeking an iterative process of engagement with the Chief that allows volunteers to further consider the various options suggested. And at each step, I'm hoping to have the opportunity to come back and seek feedback – especially through District Councils. Though our actions, I hope to demonstrate the importance of volunteers being involved in our consultative structures and providing feedback when requested.

On this note, I remind members that very shortly, we'll be launching this year's VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey. The survey is a trusted, reliable and important method used to capture the views of volunteers by volunteers, while also tracking trends in volunteer opinion over the years. And I'd argue there has never been a more important time for volunteers to have their say on how their CFA experience is tracking. And while all your details are confidential, the deidentified results go straight to decision and policy makers.

You can sign up now for pre-registration at the VFBV website on your phone, tablet or computer, or keep an eye out for when it's launched. We can even post you a paper copy should you so desire. Your voice matters and will have an impact on decisions affecting the future. So - if you have not participated in the survey before, make yourself a promise that you won't let this opportunity pass you by for another year. If you're not contributing to the feedback, it's a bit hard to criticise the decisions being made.

In the words of Theodore Roosevelt: "In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing."

2022 FLOOD RECOVERY

Resources Fact Sheet

VFBV is maintaining a Flood Recovery Resources Fact Sheet to assist members and their families to navigate the various sources of assistance in relation to the Victorian flood event.

The Fact Sheet provides useful information on:

- Emergency re-establishment assistance grants
- Emergency relief payments
- Personal hardship assistance programs
- Emergency service volunteer expense reimbursement
- Australian government disaster recovery payments and allowances
- Business support and recovery
- VFBV Welfare Fund grants

Visit www.vfbv.com.au to access the Fact Sheet or call us on (03) 9886 1141





FLOOD RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

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

As I write, we are anxiously holding our breath as we monitor flood levels and the prospect of more rain forecast over the coming weeks. Communities right across the State continue to experience major flooding, with more than 950,000 sandbags having been laid across the state in the past seven days alone. The sandbagging response represent an extraordinary shared effort by emergency services, local councils, businesses and community members to prepare for rising flood levels, and the CFA model of sharing responsibility with the community again comes to the fore as we witness community resilience in practice.

While SES remains the primary agency, CFA has again risen to the occasion to support our friends and colleagues, with at time of writing more than 3000 CFA volunteer deployments over the last seven days alone. These figures only represent incident response, and do not account for the thousands of deployments occurring to assist with community programs. Since 12 October, the SES received more than 9500 requests for assistance (RFA), with the key locations of RFAs coming from Shepparton, Rochester, Echuca, Kialla and Mooropna. While these may have been the hotspots for RFAs, the wider impacts are clear and there are many, many other communities similarly impacted right across the state.

Current impact assessments indicate close to 700 homes have been deemed uninhabitable, with approximately 12,000+ agricultural properties estimated to be impacted by flooding across Northern Victoria alone. Agriculture Victoria are estimating close to 35,000ha of farm area is affected, including 881km of fencing.

As per usual, CFA volunteers have selflessly turned their attention and efforts to assisting with the flood response and coming to the aid of their local communities. There are countless stories of rescues and evacuations, not to mention assisting property owners and the vulnerable prepare their properties.

Those brigades not under direct threat continue to reach across their boundaries and offer support and assistance

to those communities that are. Metropolitan districts have also assisted by providing surge to strike teams and IMT rotations, and will play a critical role over the coming weeks and months as we transition to recovery.

The value of the deep networks and relationships built over many decades in each of our brigade's communities has resulted in fast and effective response to what is always a dynamic and evolving risk.

As previous emergencies have taught us, we need to remain vigilant and disciplined in our approach to ensure fatigue and exhaustion don't overwhelm. As always, this is a marathon not a sprint, and brigades will remain helping these communities long after the initial emergency has passed.

VFBV has issued a fact sheet to assist members directly impacted access the various local, state and commonwealth support available. We have researched the various resources available in order to provide a simplified pathway to navigate to get support. Grants are available to assist with temporary accommodation, food, clothing and personal items. For example, the Personal Hardship Assistance Program's Emergency Re-establishment Assistance fund can provide up to \$42,250 to help pay for clean-up, repairs and rebuilding to eligible people.

In our research, it is clear that many of the services available rely on internet access to navigate, but there are a number of hotlines that have been established that can assist people over the phone. The Flood Recovery Hotline is one such example and members can call 1800 560 760 to start to access the various support available.

For those without phone or internet access, information is also available face-to-face through any of the seven emergency relief centres that are currently active across the state.

VFBV Support Officers are also available to any brigade that needs assistance linking impacted members with the various support options.

We'll keep an eye out for changes in what is being offered

and will provide regular updates to try and keep the fact sheet relevant and current. A live version of the Fact Sheet is being maintained on our website.

While efforts are quite rightly prioritised on response during the next little while, there will come a time when it is appropriate to lean more into the recovery space. I encourage brigades to continue to link up with the various recovery agencies to ensure efforts are joined up and not duplicated at the local level.

Brigades are doing an incredible job responding to community needs, and CFA volunteers are again demonstrating why CFA is known as the 'can do' organisation. No matter the need, we find a way to just get it done, with as little fuss as possible.

On behalf of the whole VFBV family, can I please express how proud we are of your efforts.

Please look after yourselves and maintain the focussed discipline that you are trained for in order to keep yourself, your crews and by extension - your communities safe. The provision of your selfless duty to those in need is amongst the highest of virtues and you are a shining example of the very professionalism that CFA volunteers are renowned for. Well done and keep safe.

VALE

It was with great sadness that we bode farewell to Bill Watson AFSM who passed away on 11 October after a long battle of complications arising from heart surgery back in June. A beautiful service was held in Wonthaggi on the 21st October to reflect and celebrate Bill's life and his significant contribution to CFA, VFBV and his community.

Bill held numerous senior positions across his long volunteer career commencing his service with CFA in 1968 with the Ferntree Gully Fire Brigade.

Following his national service and relocation to Wonthaggi in 1975, Bill joined the Wonthaggi Brigade, where he would later become Captain in 1983. He moved back to Ferntree Gully in '93, where he again stepped up to Captain with the Ferntree Gully Fire Brigade in 1999, before moving back to Wonthaggi in early 2016.

Bill would have been the first person arranging task forces to assist with the current flood recovery operations, having established the concept following the 2012 North East floods, where he was the VFBV District 13 Council President at the time. This concept was later adapted by Bill to support drought, fire, flood and further extended to support farmers and dairy farmers during bouts of hard times.

Bill's service to the association was long and varied, having served in multiple positions, including as President of the VFBV District 13 Council 2011-2014, and much earlier

as the President of the Urban Association District 8 Council in the late 80s, with him again serving as State Councillor for District 8 up until his illness. Bill was a mentor to many and was a key driver of the VFBV Youth Network.

We have lost a great friend and advocate, and Bill will be sorely missed. His passion and advocacy for firefighter safety was second to none, with Bill most recently founding the 'Healthy Fire Stations' initiative.

We send our thoughts, prayers and sympathy to Gay, Lisa, family, friends and loved ones and thank them most sincerely for sharing Bill with us. We also extend our thoughts to fellow members of the Wonthaggi and Ferntree Gully fire brigades.

ELECTION

On Saturday 26th November, Victorians will head to the polls for the 2022 State election.

The needs and desires of CFA volunteers has been well ventilated over the years, and VFBV has undertaken extensive work over the years to educate members of Parliament from all sides of the political divide on how the contribution of volunteers can be appropriately recognised, respected and supported.

Equitable and sustainable funding and resourcing to ensure brigades are equipped to serve their communities; respecting the Volunteer Charter and the commitments made under it; protecting volunteers from inappropriate political and industrial interference; and a commitment to building and strengthening the capacity and capability of volunteers to protect their communities have all been identified by volunteers as critical measures to support the vital role that CFA volunteers play across the Victorian emergency management sector.

Members should reach out to candidates and ask how their policies address the above priorities, before deciding on your vote.

Brigades are also urged to reflect on the support they have received from each of their local MPs over the past years, both individually and as a collective. Many brigades have written to MP's over various issues across the last term and are best placed to reflect on whether the responses they received met the brigade's expectations or not.

Volunteers will always support those that support them, and we urge all members of parliament to reflect on their own contribution over the proceeding four years in supporting and respecting the vital and valued individuals who make up CFA, and whether or not their deeds and actions have honoured the words and commitments they have made in Parliament and through legislation.



VFBV | VOLUNTEER FIRE
BRIGADES VICTORIA

2 Minute Briefings December 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.

2 Minute Briefing

Joint Communications and Technology

December 2022

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

RADIO REPLACEMENT UPDATE

Members will be pleased to hear that the Radio Replacement Project (RRP) has advanced considerably since our last update. VFBV welcomed the news that the \$126 million project will introduce new radios into the service across the state. There have been some very good advances through the user reference group in the RRP with CFA now advancing to a stage where brigades across the state will be asked for their input. Desktop, lab evaluations and field evaluations have been completed and CFA is now progressing to a pilot which is expected to begin across a variety of brigades in the new year to test the preferred devices. Mobile radios and portable radios have been tested and will offer dual bands, (UHF and VHF) to ensure they have operational capabilities across the entire emergency management sector, Australia wide. The radios will be tested and have a high safety rating, GPS capability and some capability to use the regional mobile radio network should signal quality diminish in blackspot areas. One key feature is voice activation to choose channel and volume controls. The testing will continue in a range of situations, terrain and areas over the next few months to ensure that volunteers are involved in the full testing. Global supply chain issues are being worked through to ensure the rollout is as seamless as possible when the project gets to the procurement stage.

TABLETS IN TRUCKS

Many brigades are currently using tablets to access pre plans, alerting services and maps when responding to callouts and have been requesting direction on how to install their devices safely in their appliances. The current Mobility Project is progressing well with the plan to have a proof of concept involving 30 vehicles in the initial stage at the start of next year. These CFA supplied tablets will have a number of applications with FIRS online, SAS, Hazmat, Road Crash Rescue, Weather, EMCOP and Pre plans and is intended to make it easier for brigades. The intent is that members will see a significant reduction in paperwork which hopefully will see a reduction in the workload of volunteers. The project will include the device and installation.

SUPPORT FOR CB RADIOS

The Committee has held robust discussions with CFA concerning the installation of CB Radios in appliances. Volunteer delegates have advocated for support for the use of CB radios in CFA appliances as they believe it to be operationally necessary as there are organisations present that do not have CFA radios installed, and the inability to speak with heavy machinery, private appliances and other organisations presents a safety risk. Delegates have raised that in most cases there is only one radio in CFA appliances (excluding FCV's) making it difficult for both establishing a command channel and monitoring FireCom at the same time. Consensus was reached with CFA that CB radio should be supported for installation where required and the Committee agreed it should not be in the most prominent location, with this location reserved for the CFA radio.

CYBER SECURITY

There has been a lot of media recently about cyber security breaches in large organisations and this item remains a standing item for discussion within the Committee with a CFA commitment to ensure the security of volunteer data and privacy remains at the top of the ICT strategy. Updating equipment and 2 factor authentication are key ways that the organisation will continue to ensure CFA's systems are more secure. Members are reminded not to share passwords or security access with third parties in any circumstances. CFA will continue to work towards CFA's systems being as secure as possible, with discussions on how this can be achieved with the least amount of inconvenience to members as possible.

Delegates have requested the ability to extend the length of the ring time on both RMR and MMR radio networks as members have reported it was not long enough to answer the call. CFA advised this was not configurable just for one agency but will investigate further to explore options. An operational justification request will need to be prepared.

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

MOBILE ENGAGEMENT UNITS (MEU)

Members will recall in our previous 2-minute briefings we outlined the plan to build Mobile Engagement Units funded by the generous public donations from the 2019/2020 Black Summer fires. The vehicles have been designed to be available to brigades to use at open days, markets, community education events and fire safety awareness days for Community Safety Officers to deliver bushfire safety education to Victorian communities, schools, public events, and tourist hotspots. The initial eight vehicles will be built on a Ford 350L Custom chassis and will be fully self-supported with battery management systems and solar panels. Each van will be fitted out with large external TV screens, white boards, 240-volt power outlets to connect laptop computers, Wi-Fi, external lighting and a PA system with handheld microphones which work independently of the TV's audio system.

All units will be able to be driven on a standard car licence and will come fully equipped to ensure a consistent fire safety message is delivered to communities across the state. For members to be able to easily operate these vehicles a training package will be available, with QR codes placed within each vehicle for members to access instructions from their mobile devices.

The vans will be painted with a unique external colour scheme to help them stand out and will be based at various locations that will allow good state-wide coverage, with the aim for volunteer travel time to access one of these vehicles to be less than an hour for outer metropolitan brigades and less than two hours for most brigades in rural areas. Vehicles can now be booked by Brigades via an online booking system which is accessible through Members Online.

FIRE SAFETY PLANNING WORKSHOPS

Delegates were informed the redevelopment of Fire Safety Planning Workshops continues with the introduction of a 'behavioural change model'. The behavioural change model is based upon research and feedback from members of the public to better understand the risks posed by fire. The package is intended to further empower people by building upon what is their current level of knowledge and understanding of fire safety and planning.

These Workshops are information sessions that are targeted at people living in high-risk environments and are designed to enable people to create their own fire plans that are relevant to their geographical location and risk factors. The sessions are delivered as a workshop and they focus on teaching participants how fire behaves, different kinds of fuel and an understanding of how fire spreads, how to prepare a property, how to plan for fire and options for personal survival if the plans fail. The workshops will include videos of people's lived experience as well as animations to increase understanding of fire behaviour. Much of the focus of the workshops places an emphasis on the importance of people making a decision and doing it early. Development of new planning guides are also underway to compliment the workshop delivery.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GUIDELINES

Delegates have been involved in providing input into an internal document that gives CFA members a clear understanding of the process of initiating, delivering and reporting on community engagement activities in a consistent manner across the state. The guidelines have been in development since 2021.

The guidelines are based on the premise that community engagement is something that every member in CFA can do and are aimed to provide standards, principles, checklists, templates, and other resources to effectively design and deliver CFA community engagement activities consistently. The guidelines will significantly contribute to empowering members to deliver effective community engagement services to their community. Further work has been done by the committee to ensure these guidelines offer the right approach for our members and to ensure they will become well used by volunteers once the final document is released.

2 Minute Briefing

Joint Equipment & Infrastructure

December 2022

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

ULT REMEDIATION WORKS

VFBV has worked very hard to ensure the concerns of the brigades affected by the overweight ULT's was addressed. After some very strong advocacy from delegates and brigades across the State we can confidently report that the remediation works on the 40 Ultra light Tankers (ULT) affected by the weight distribution issues outline in Safety Alert 86 are almost completed with CFA fleet reporting that the additional ULT weight mitigation modifications are nearing completion. 37 of 40 have been completed to date. While this has taken longer than originally anticipated, we are pleased that our tireless advocacy will result in brigades having their appliances ready for this fire season.

In addition to this CFA is also scoping the use of the Isuzu DMAX as an alternative to the Ford Ranger for Field Command Vehicle builds. While this is very early in review stages it may provide CFA with an alternative so that brigades are not locked into one supplier in the future should there be any other engineering issues that arise. We will continue to report to members as this continues to evolve.

COMMUNITY SAFETY BUILDING AUTHORITY

CFA has begun the transition of 20 building projects across to the new Community Safety Building Authority (CSBA). The CSBA will co-ordinate the construction to deliver emergency service facilities on behalf of Government across the State. CFA's land and building services is currently assessing projects and will adopt a phased approach to transitioning the 20 projects in the initial stages. Delegates have raised concerns about the affect of this on the input brigades will have in the building of fire stations given they often have community input and individual requirements. VFBV has expressed its disappointment at the lack of engagement from the new authority and is escalating its concerns that the new authority appears to be ignoring its obligations under the Volunteer Charter that requires direct engagement with the elected representatives of volunteers.

Delegates will closely monitor the changeover to this new system to ensure brigades are not left out of the decision-making process and have asked CFA to provide updates every quarter on progress of the projects.

ENTRAPMENT INSTRUCTIONS – SAFETY IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVE

Delegates have continued their advocacy in requesting CFA to investigate the concept of printing the entrapment procedures on the inside of the internal fire protection curtains. A burn over is likely to be one of the most stressful experiences a member encounters, and this initiative attempts to support members recall all the steps required to prepare for a burn over. Delegates are pleased to report that this project has advanced considerably and is close to being rolled out across the fleet. CFA has developed prototype 'labels' for the internal fire curtain and are testing the most effective way of attaching them to the curtains and the best position on the curtain for the greatest effectiveness. The 'labels' are intended to be a reminder/checklist to members of the procedure when having to undertake a 'burn over' and will provide a dot point process to remind members of the steps. It is envisaged once the final designs are agreed to, they will be retrofitted as a part of the general service intervals when trucks go into the DMO Workshops.

SOLAR STATIONS

VFBV continues to advocate for CFA support to increase the uptake of solar panel installations on stations. With innovation and technology progressing in leaps and bounds volunteer stations have not had a substantive design review since 2013. In welcome news, CFA has agreed to a station design review working party and it is hoped by members that the new future designs will have availability for alternative power sources like solar. Delegates have advised CFA that many brigades are retrofitting stations with alternative energy sources to reduce their carbon footprint and using grant money and community funds to bring their stations up to modern building compliance.

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

LATEST CHILD SAFETY ONLINE MODULE

Identifying Harm and Responding to Disclosures is the latest child safety module to be made available to volunteers online. We are pleased to report that as a result of the concerns raised by delegates in previous meetings; where volunteers were limited to three attempts to complete the module, this particular module can be downloaded in full by the brigade training officer, thereby allowing brigades unlimited access and availability.

CFA also discussed a proposal to expand the number of roles that may require a Working with Children's Check (WWCC), in the future. For example, community engagement and smoke alarm installers. VFBV is supportive of a risk based approach and has requested consultation with volunteers on any further roles being considered. VFBV has advised CFA that it believes competition coaches should also be a position where a WWCC is required.

CFA MEDICAL APPEAL AND GUIDELINES REVIEW UPDATE

Following the concerns raised by VFBV in the inconsistent approach to assessing medical conditions, work is continuing on CFA role analysis to identify the tasks that may require a medical professional to assess a member's suitability for. These role statements are designed to encourage a more informed and consistent assessment by a medical practitioner of the impact a certain condition may have on a person's ability to perform a specific task or role. They are designed to minimise needless and arbitrary 'stand down' orders being issued to volunteers when they notify CFA of a medical condition. Once the role analysis is completed, they will be reviewed and then added to an online role library that is being established, which will be made available to volunteers. Concurrently, CFA is developing new CFA Medical Guidelines and Standards which will replace the outdated AFAC Medical Standards that are currently in use.

VFBV is pleased to advise that approximately twelve volunteer delegates contributed to this work via two working groups and provided extensive input and feedback throughout the entire process. Those same volunteers remain in consultation, along with a range of other CFA subject matter experts, as the projects nears completion. Of those twelve volunteers, three were 'stood down' medically. The information and insight provided by them and others has been instrumental in major changes to the medical standards and the CFA Medical Appeal Process.

MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY AND WELLBEING

In part, as response to the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Psychological Health) Regulations (Vic) pending release later this year, and to replace Mental Health First Aid and The Working Mind First Responder, the committee discussed the online e-learn modules currently under development by CFA. The proposed modules would include 3 x 20-minute training sessions for leaders and similarly, 3 x 20 minutes sessions for members. Also available would be face to face facilitated training, dealing with psychological risks, hazards, stress and trauma. VFBV expressed their support for initiatives that address and better equip volunteers to understand and cope with mental health issues and suggested CFA would benefit from going 'to the coal face' and consulting with volunteers who through profound and life changing experiences find themselves experiencing many aspects of psychological stress and trauma by virtue of their volunteering. CFA agreed this approach could add depth to the work and the proposed learnings. As a result, a number of volunteers have been identified and are currently engaged with CFA, providing unique and valuable insight, feedback and input to benefit all volunteers in their understanding of mental health. It is hoped the modules will be available shortly.

PRESUMPTIVE LEGISLATION CLAIMS SUPPORT

VFBV continues to work with CFA and the external law firm engaged by WorkSafe to manage presumptive legislation claims to improve the volunteer claims experience. As a result of this work a dedicated claims specialist has been appointed and an information pack and materials are being developed to better support claimants and clearly outline the roles of all persons involved in the claims process. We will provide feedback and review the info pack as it is developed.

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

COMPRESSED AIR FOAM SYSTEM STRATEGY

Earlier this year CFA purchased the Tasmanian Fire Service Heavy Compressed Air Foam System (CAFS) tanker and is currently retrofitting the appliance to CFA standards. Delegates to the Joint Operations Committee are requesting CFA develop a Compressed Air Foam System (CAFS) state-wide strategy to inform further investments and help inform Region and District operations. While the 8200lt water capacity of the vehicle will provide a huge boost to CFA's capability to deal with large incidents, delegates believe there are plenty of smaller and routine type incidents that would benefit from CAFS capability such as haystacks, peat fires and rubbish tip fires which are traditionally very difficult to put out and burn for long periods and release a lot of smoke into the atmosphere impacting upon the community's air quality. The lack of a CAFS strategy means there is currently no guidance or direction provided to fleet services and informing new appliance builds. CFA currently has funding to retrofit 2 heavy tankers and 2 medium tankers with a CAFS. VFBV has provided a volunteer subject matter expert to sit on a small working party and will keep you posted on the outcomes of the project.

WILDFIRE HELMETS

State Council recently supported requests from brigades seeking to review the current wildfire firefighting helmet. Given the length of time the current helmet has been in service, and the fact that the Australian Standards are due to be updated shortly, delegates have asked CFA to establish a consultative process to start planning a review. To avoid mistakes of the past, delegates have requested the review include a comprehensive market scan to evaluate what is on the market, as well as a review of what helmets are in use nationally across the sector to inform this work.

SLOW PROGRESS ON BA STRATEGY

Delegates have continued to voice their frustration at the lack of a clear state-wide BA strategy. For example, while the 'swap and go' system of cylinder exchange has some benefits, it was introduced by stealth following FRV's possession of what used to be CFA's BA Vans, and without a clear plan or consultation on how it will be rolled out. Without this plan, there is little guidance on the number of filling stations and cylinder caches required, and their size and locations across the state. There is also no agreed method or technology to record in real time where each cylinder is presently housed. There is concern that in the absence of a state strategy that Districts have been left to develop their own BA Strategies and this could lead to a variety of strategies across the state that could be significantly different, and risks duplication and interoperability issues, especially in respect to working with other agencies. VFBV consider the state-wide BA strategy as a priority for the organisation and will continue to pursue a speedy resolution. Delegates have requested that CFA broadly consult on the strategy before it is implemented as there has been a lot of interest from the membership across the state, and therefore the sooner this work commences the better.

Delegates are also awaiting information from the BA sticker pilot that CFA appears to have unilaterally initiated. With the introduction of the Pacific F15 helmet as the only structure helmet available moving forward it has been the concern of some volunteers that there is no clear way to identify members who have internal BA qualification as opposed to members who do not have the Search and Rescue qualification so therefore can only wear BA externally. CFA has reported that a pilot sticker is being trialled in one district for the next 6 months and then there will be a permanent decision made after the trial is completed. Members of the committee have questioned why the trial needs to be for such a long period of time and have sought involvement and engagement of the committee during the pilot.

ACFO/COMMANDER VACANCIES CONTINUE TO FRUSTRATE

VFBV continues to raise the concerns raised by many volunteers of the 'revolving door' of District staff and the associated impacts this has on services and continuity to the volunteers in Districts. While CFA has had some recent success in filling some long-term vacancies – there continues to be an unacceptable level of vacancies impacting leave plans that is still causing many issues. VFBV will continue to raise and pursue.

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TRAINER AND ASSESSOR ENDORSEMENT

Delegates continue to raise with CFA regarding inconsistencies across the Regions and Districts with the endorsement for Volunteer Trainer and Assessors (VTAs). CFA HQ has undertaken to write to the Managers for Learning and Development to ensure that the endorsement process is applied consistently across the 5 Regions and all their Districts. CFA provided VFBV Delegates with an update of the plans for ongoing professional development opportunities for Volunteer Trainer and Assessors. Templates will be available for VTAs to record their professional development, as is required of trainers in all registered training organisations and to provide assistance to the trainers and assessors from all districts. CFA will also be conducting online professional development sessions for VTAs to access, and we encourage all Trainer and Assessors to continue to provide feedback to their local training team.

LANGUAGE, LITERACY AND NUMERACY SUPPORT

As a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), CFA is required to provide support to members who experience difficulties with Language, Literacy or Numeracy (LLN). An especially important requirement for CFA in particular, as training must cater for a large cross section of the community and students who need extra support with LLN should not be disadvantaged. To this end, CFA presented a new LLN self-assessment test at the last Joint Training Committee meeting. This test is intended to help students identify if they have any issues that their trainer should be made aware of. VFBV delegates have requested CFA supply further information and tools to support Trainer and Assessors in being able to effectively identify and manage the needs of students with LLN difficulties who may not highlight this during training sessions. It is very important that any member who feels that they may require extra support with LLN are strongly encouraged to discretely raise this with their brigade training officer, District Manager Learning and Development or trainer before the commencement of their course.

STRUCTURAL TRAINING

VFBV continues to advocate very strongly for finalisation of CFA's new structural firefighting training. This training has had many setbacks and delays and delegates have worked hard to keep the pressure on CFA to address the issues and get the package released as soon as possible.

In welcome news, the new Respond to Urban Fire Fighter training development is edging closer to reality. A subset of the VFBV Delegates and subject matter experts from the Joint Training Committee have contributed a huge amount of work to provide feedback to CFA on the updated course.

The new course is significantly different from the previous Structural Firefighter course to ensure that it is compliant with the PUA19 National Competency Standard and equips graduates with the skills and knowledge necessary to respond in a proficient and safe manner to a range of structural fires. Unfortunately, the restructured course is considerably longer than the old structural course and volunteer representatives continue to work with CFA to research and develop delivery mechanisms for the course that will make it suitable to all members who wish to gain this qualification. Initiatives such as self-learning, online classrooms and flexible face to face sessions, that allow for the most effective use of Volunteer's time and efficient allocation of trainers and training facilities have been discussed. CFA is hoping to have the course endorsement completed by the end of the year for delivery to the districts to allocate to their 2023 training calendars.

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GIVE US A HAND

Brigades have been calling for a state-wide recruitment and retention campaign. Many brigades are successfully running their own local recruitment drives while others are struggling to grab the attention of members of the community. It is fair to say that with a lot of competition for people's time, recruitment of volunteers is challenging across the whole of the emergency sector and there is no 'one size fits all' approach.

CFA have joined with other emergency sector organisations and developed a digital 'give us a hand' campaign to try to engage new members to join CFA but, there is no Government funding for any broadscale TV or radio campaign which is hampering local brigade efforts. Recent figures continue to show a downward trend in the overall membership of CFA with data indicating that more people are leaving the organisation than are joining, with a drop in overall numbers of volunteers recorded for the 7th quarter in a row. While recruitment is vital, retention of existing experienced volunteers is equally as important, and brigades are calling for a Government funded retention and recognition campaign as well as a recruitment campaign. VFBV will continue to advocate for improved support to assist brigade efforts.

VOLUNTEER EXIT SURVEY

Volunteers who leave the organisation have the ability to complete a Volunteer Exit Survey which is designed to give a clear picture of their time with the organisation. There are some interesting statistics which can be drawn from the exit survey for the last quarter of 2021. Importantly close to 40% of members who leave the organisation have indicated they would consider coming back again at some time and 59% would recommend to others to join CFA, and 76% were satisfied with their time at CFA. These figures have gone generally unchanged from surveys taken over the past 5 years, and present an opportunity to reengage with past members.

YOUTH CADETS PILOT UPDATE

In an update on the Youth Cadets program from our last report in March this year there are some very encouraging aspects that are continuing to develop and strengthen the participation and retention of 16-17 year olds. Younger members involved in the pilot have told us that their knowledge of future pathways through the organisation will allow them to develop in their brigades and has given them confidence to look to future roles in the brigade as they grow older. They have commented on their improved knowledge of health and safety issues and responsibilities and clear understanding of CFA's child safe practices and responsibilities has been really beneficial. The pilot program was run over two face-to-face weekends at West Sale and Central Highlands training campuses and a series of online modules that members could work through in their own time. The pilot program will culminate in a project closure report and recommendations that will form the basis of a final decision on the future of a Youth Cadets program.

FIXING INACCURATE SERVICE HISTORY

Members will recall that the decision was made back in 2012 to change the membership classifications and only have 2 types of membership for senior members within CFA, 'Brigade member' or 'Operational member'. This meant that members who were classified as 'Auxiliary members' were given the option of transferring across to the 'Brigade member' title. VFBV has become aware there are auxiliary members who have 'slipped through the net' and their service records do not contain their historical auxiliary years of service. CFA has provided a process for members to update their records. The member must provide evidence of their service by showing attendance records, media stories, records of the associations they were members of or fill out a statutory declaration stating the periods in question. District offices will then validate the years of service and finally the District ACFO will endorse the member and update RMS. Members will then be able to receive their service medals the same as current members do. If members discover their service history is inaccurate, you are encouraged to reach out to your District Office to commence the process of updating it.



VFBV | VOLUNTEER FIRE
BRIGADES VICTORIA

SURVEY 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 - we want to hear from you, please have your say.



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

LAST YEAR



WE LISTENED TO

2643
CFA VOLUNTEERS