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MEDIA RELEASE

CFA VOLUNTEER HIGHLY COMMENDED FOR PROTECTION INITIATIVE

If there's one thing Upper Ferntree Gully CFA volunteer Darren Johnson wants to protect as much as his community, it's his fellow firefighters.

Darren has devised a simple system so firefighters can easily access safety blankets if they're stuck in a burn-over.

Introducing the blanket retention and deployment system earned Darren a highly commended honour in the recent Spirit of CFA awards.

In 2009 three brigade members were caught in a fire that destroyed their truck.

"From hearing their stories about trying to get the blankets out from behind their seats and out of their plastic bags in a time-critical burn-over, I thought we could come up with a better system," Darren said.

Darren used space in the rollover protection area to store two blankets.

He came up with a design that was trialled and found to be easy to handle. The system has been updated to make it more practical, with a bigger release handle that is more visible and added clips and buckles making it easier to re-stow.

In burn-overs, curtains cover truck windows and a spray system puts water over the truck and the thick blankets are a vital part of their line of defence.

All firefighters escaped the 2009 fire, but Darren said their experiences continued to resonate with the brigade.

"With this system you've got a blanket out in seconds," he said.

The system is used in both upper Ferntree Gully trucks. Darren has also installed a set on Mt Evelyn's truck.

“It’s simple and inexpensive and because it’s a strap it can go between different styles of roll bars,” Darren said. “You just have to reach up and the blanket is deployed in seconds, and it’s easy to re-set.”

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria CEO Andrew Ford congratulated Darren on the initiative and said it was another example of volunteers putting safety and professionalism at the forefront of fighting fires.

“Volunteers are a vital part of every regional Victorian community. As one of the most fire-prone places in the world, Victorians can be confident that with almost 60,000 volunteers and 1000 paid firefighters, we’re professionally trained and equipped for all fire risks and our huge volunteer numbers mean we can step up and respond anywhere in the state in times of disaster,” Mr Ford said.

People interested in volunteering can contact their local brigade or visit www.vfbv.com.au

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