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MEDIA RELEASE

CFA volunteers rope in specialised skills to help save lives

A car has tumbled from the road down a steep hill in outer Melbourne, trapping the occupants inside. They need to be rescued using specialised steep angle rope techniques – and highly trained emergency services volunteers from northern Melbourne are on scene.

It was all a training exercise, but on the Sunday before National Volunteer Week (20-26 May) started, CFA and SES volunteers gave yet another demonstration of their professionalism, dedication and their commitment to the safety of others by giving up their Sunday morning to train and practice their skills.

National Volunteer Week recognises that volunteers ‘make a world of difference’ and that’s certainly the case for emergency services volunteers, who regularly give up weeknights and weekends to ensure they have the capabilities needed to save others and keep their communities safe.

The CFA District 14 Multi Agency Rope Rescue Team, formed only a year ago, includes volunteers from Plenty CFA and Nillumbik and Whittlesea SES. During the exercise they practiced specialised steep angle rescue techniques that have been called on five times already since they started the additional service.

Volunteers from neighbouring Yarrambat and Diamond Creek CFA brigades assisted at the exercise to learn more about the technique, which is particularly valuable for emergency responders in hilly terrains. In all, around 40 volunteers from CFA and SES gave up their Sunday to hone skills that save lives.

Mark Gravell, President of CFA District 14 Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria council, said members of the specialised rope rescue team routinely trained for up to 12 hours a month to develop and maintain their skills, on top of their normal weekly CFA / SES training.

“The exercise involved rescuing the ‘victims’ from the vehicle, and then recovering the vehicle itself,” Mr Gravell said.

“I want to thank the Nillumbik Shire Council for its support for the local emergency services volunteers, and for letting us use the abandoned vehicle for our training – although I suppose there was mutual benefit in cleaning the local environment by removing the wreck!

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VFBV Media Contact: Megan Lane - 0431 671 999



“That is what CFA is all about – working in and with local communities, by local community members. That’s what we want to remember during Volunteer Week and every week.” Mr Gravell said Plenty CFA volunteers had raised more than \$16,000 for the specialised equipment required for the Rope Rescue unit.

“What makes volunteers so valuable in this context is that they’ll lead the whole thing and make it happen for their community – identifying operational needs, raising funds, training, responding: it’s a mentally and physically challenging role but it’s also one of the most satisfying and fulfilling roles you could undertake.”

CFA District 14 has 40 CFA brigades and more than 2200 volunteers and incorporates areas of metropolitan Melbourne from Werribee in the west, Epping, South Morang and Whittlesea in the north, and Eltham and North Warrandyte in the east. These brigades regularly support for other CFA brigades and nearby MFB stations as well as covering their primary response areas.

CFA protects more than 60% of metropolitan Melbourne overall, and District 14 brigade includes industrial, residential and agricultural zones, with a mix of hazard types. District 14, like others where there is a high density of CFA volunteers, is also a key source of highly trained surge capacity for large or long duration fires, such as major industrial incidents and large bushfires such as those in Gippsland this past fire season.

There are several CFA volunteer brigades that have developed specialised capabilities in District 14, including a Road Accident Rescue unit based at Epping and Plenty, and a Large Animal Rescue unit based in Arthur’s Creek.

Research shows that volunteering not only enhances an individual’s sense of satisfaction and wellbeing, but volunteering builds significant public value and social capital, said VFBV CEO Adam Barnett.

“Within the emergency management sector, the value of partnering with communities and sharing responsibility through a collective sense of pride and purpose delivers enormous community benefits to the public such as an increased sense of safety, self-reliance and community confidence. All vital ingredients for strong, safe and resilient communities,” Mr Barnett said.

Exercise details: held Sunday 19 May 2019 at 09:30 am, Worn’s Lane, Yarrambat.

High resolution photographs:

<http://media.vfbvd14.com/index.php/2019/05/21/plenty-cfa-press/>

VFBV Media Contact: Megan Lane - 0431 671 999