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MEDIA RELEASE

VICTORIA'S BUSIEST VOLUNTEER PUMPER KEEPS GETTING BUSIER

The Narre Warren CFA brigade has just become the busiest volunteer brigade in the state and the volunteers are rising to the challenge.

In 2016 Narre Warren responded to a mammoth 793 call outs, more than two every day. This year it's heading in the same direction with 224 incidents by the middle of April but Captain Paul Hardy said the 105 volunteer members are keeping up with the demand and keeping the community safe.

The brigade is also reaching out across the broader region to provide support during major fires and incidents.

"It has been pretty busy and last year was a record," Mr Hardy said. "For the past five years we've attended around 600-700 incidents but we did top 700 the year of the Black Saturday fires."

"In addition to calls in our local community we also provide support to surrounding brigades in Cranbourne, Berwick, Hampton Park and Hallam and regularly provide crews to help right across Victoria as part of CFA's vital surge capacity and response to major fires that occur most summers."

The volunteers attend mainly structure fires and car accidents.

Although demand is growing, the brigade is coping and responding to the challenge.

"We have systems in place to ensure we have crews 24 hours a day," Mr Hardy said. "Some of these volunteers do upwards of 300 calls a year, especially the younger volunteers who are very passionate about it."

Mr Hardy said the brigade had a good number of committed volunteers but was always on the lookout for new recruits, especially those available to respond to daytime incidents.

There are 55 operational volunteers along with a catering team and about 15 juniors. Narre Warren has its own catering trailer and can serve up to 200 people across the district when there's a major incident.

The volunteers also maintain their professional skills by undertaking training sessions every Tuesday night, along with extra training for new recruits.

Mr Hardy has been a CFA volunteer for 21 years and is also a firefighter on HMAS Cerberus. "I do it for a job and do it for free as well so I must enjoy it," he said.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria CEO Andrew Ford said Narre Warren was a great example of a volunteer brigade being able to effectively cope with very busy urban area service demands while also helping the rest of the state in times of crisis.

"The beauty of the CFA volunteer system is that it can grow and expand along with growth in risk and workload," Mr Ford said.

"At the same time teams from Narre Warren can be deployed during major incidents like the Black Saturday fires while still maintaining local service coverage."

"Being one of the most bushfire prone areas in the world we know how important it is for Victoria to be able to call on large numbers of trained and experienced volunteers for the big fires."

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