



# VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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## VFBV AFFILIATION: ANOTHER RECORD BREAKING YEAR

Thank you for members' strong show of support.

VFBV's record Brigade affiliation continues with this year's affiliation rates maintaining the previous record-high, with over 95% of Brigades affiliating with VFBV, demonstrating support for the important work that VFBV does on behalf of all CFA volunteers.

The 2017/18 renewal notices for your Brigade/Group's VFBV Affiliation and VFBV Volunteer Welfare Fund Subscription have now been sent to all brigades and groups.

As well as affiliating with VFBV, we strongly encourage Brigades to subscribe to the VFBV Welfare Fund.

Last year 90% of Brigades have chosen to subscribe to the VFBV Welfare Fund which provides small grants of up to \$5,000 to assist volun-

teer members, their immediate family members and long serving ex-members. The grants support members experiencing personal financial hardship/crisis by providing welfare grants, on a needs assessed basis, that may assist in alleviating stresses impacting on the individual's ability to maintain their involvement as a volunteer.

The Welfare Fund and its predecessor bodies have been providing grants to volunteers since 1913, well before the establishment of CFA. In the last 10 years alone, with careful management, the Welfare Fund has been able to provide grants worth over \$1,000,000 to assist over 369 volunteers in need.

VFBV funds all the administration, operating costs and welfare application processing for the VFBV Welfare Fund ensuring 100% of your

## Annual Brigade/Group Allowance Survey

Enclosed in this month's VFBV mailout to all Brigades and Groups is a Annual Allowance Survey. The issue of Brigade and Group allowances is regularly raised with VFBV delegates as a matter of concern amongst members.

As a result, State Council has recently decided to survey all Brigades and Groups to determine if current allowances are adequate.

By inviting all Brigades and Groups to participate, we will be able to consolidate volunteer's views on this issue, both at the local and State level as well as collect evidence to support any future advocacy on this important matter.

The survey not only asks what your current annual allowance is but asks Brigades and Groups to let us know if they think it is sufficient, and asks what you believe would be a fair annual allowance for your Brigade/Group.

The survey closes on Monday 6 August – and is also available via the VFBV website.

## VESEP ANNOUNCED

Media reports from Friday 27 April have indicated that this year's VESEP Grants program has been announced and is now open.

As at time of writing - we have not been provided any details, timelines or dates for this year's program – and no details have been released about closing date for applications.

As a result – we have not been able to update our VFBV VESEP Application Help Pack with this year's details.

The VFBV VESEP Application Help Pack has become a fixture of this annual program – loaded with tips and examples of successful applications to inspire your Brigade or Group and assist with the development of a successful application. You can still access previous years' Help Pack from our website.

We will continue to try and source finalised details and will update our Help Pack as soon as the details are available. Likewise, we are unaware of the status of CFA's application pack which is normally distributed to Brigade/Group secretaries on the day of the programs commencement.

In the meantime, we are receiving queries from Brigades and Groups wanting to know the status of their applications to the previous 'CFA Enhancing Volunteerism Grants program' that closed on the 28 February 2018.

Following enquiries, we have been advised that CFA has formed an 'Assessment Panel' that is currently assessing these applications. No timeline has been provided as to when announcements of successful applications from this program will be made.

We have informed CFA of the difficult position it is putting Brigades and Groups in who are left not knowing the result of previous applications – and are thus unable to determine if they need to re-apply or consider other initiatives under this year's VESEP program. We will continue to follow up.

Our advice at this stage is, if we assume this year's VESEP application period follows the same format as previous years, you may only have four or five weeks to lodge your application from the date of announcement.

To avoid any last-minute announcements – we suggest you start preparing your VESEP applications ASAP so you are ready when this year's CFA application pack is finally sent out.

## Nominations for Trust Fund

The VFBV Board is calling for nominations to the CFA & Brigades Donations Trust Fund.

Following nominations, five new or reappointed members will be appointed by the VFBV Board to serve as VFBV trustees on the Trust Fund for a 12 month term. The Trust Fund committee meet quarterly, either via teleconference or at CFA H.Q.

Nominations close Friday 22 June 2018 and can be mailed to VFBV office 9/24 Lakeside Drive, Burwood East 3151 or emailed to vfbv@vfbv.com

Welfare Fund contribution is used to fund grants for volunteers in need. The fund is operated as a not for profit fund, managed by a Committee of Management and is run under Australian Tax Office rules.

It is independently audited and funds are only invested in Treasurer approved investments under the Victorian Government Borrowing and Investment Powers Act 1987. More information about the Welfare Fund can be found in the Member Services area on VFBV's website [www.vfbv.com.au](http://www.vfbv.com.au)

For any queries about your Brigade/Group's VFBV Affiliation contact one of your District's State Councillors or the VFBV office on (03) 9886 1141.

## Memorial service

As this edition of 'Fire Wise' hits the streets and as at time of writing, arrangements were underway for this year's CFA Annual Memorial Service which is to be held on Sunday 6 May.

The memorial is held on the Sunday closest to St. Florian's Day which is also known as International Firefighters Day which falls each year on 4 May.

St. Florian is the Patron Saint of Firefighters and was an officer of the Roman army who was responsible for organising and leading firefighting brigades tasked to fight fires when Rome needed to protect itself against fire being used as an offensive weapon in the third century.

On St. Florian's Day, firefighters, families and communities across the world take a moment to acknowledge firefighters commitment and dedication to their communities and their selfless duty to protecting lives and property.

The Annual Memorial Service is a formal and reflective day to acknowledge and remember those that have made the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of their communities. It's a time for reflection and just one of the ways we can remember the lives of 67 CFA members and 11 Country Fire Brigades Board and Bush Fire Brigades Committee firefighters (prior to the formation of CFA), who have paid the ulti-

## VFBV CHILD SAFE POLICY

by Andrew Ford, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

I would like to focus this editorial on one important issue – child safety. I want to take this opportunity to bring members attention to an important VFBV policy focussed on our collective commitment and obligation to ensure VFBV, our activities and our work places are a safe place for children.

It is a great thing to see increasing numbers of young people participating in VFBV and CFA activities and we all need to do everything we can to encourage and support this. Today's children and young people are our future, our future dedicated volunteers, our future leaders and our future hope.

In recent years VFBV has embarked on a number of great initiatives, from formally engaging younger members through our VFBV Youth Network; offering leadership development opportunities and developing future leaders through our VFBV Leadership Scholarship Program; improving our whole organisational mindset and thinking through programs such as our VFBV Engaging Diversity workshops; and of course, through the immeasurably valuable 2018 Junior Fire Brigade competitions.

Another part of what we need to do is to continue to strengthen and ensure our VFBV processes, culture and behaviours specifically value, contemplate and action the arrangements that need to be in place to ensure VFBV and our activities are a safe place for children and to ensure everyone has confidence in these arrangements.

The VFBV Board and State Council have discussed this issue in detail over the past months and have recently updated and formally adopted a VFBV Child Safe Policy. Consistent with the

mate sacrifice and given their lives in service to protecting our communities.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the passing of the five Geelong West firefighters (02/12/1998) at Linton and also the 35th Anniversary of Ash Wednesday (16/02/1983) where CFA members from Nar Nar Goon, Narre Warren, Panton Hill and Wallacedale lost their lives. This year's annual service is to be held in Belmont, District 7.

On behalf of VFBV and all member Brigades and Groups, our thoughts and prayers are for the families, friends and loved ones of those who have died in the line of duty and for all those that have suffered loss or injury or sickness through their work, dedication and commitment to protecting their communities.

VFBV Child Safe Policy several changes were also seamlessly implemented for the 2018 VFBV State Championships so well done to everyone for jumping on board.

The scope and requirements of our VFBV policy are fundamental and because of this I am confident everyone will be nothing other than fully supportive and committed to our VFBV policy scope, intent or requirements.

Central to our VFBV approach is the desire for VFBV to take a preventative, proactive and participatory stance on child protection issues. I, along with the VFBV secretariat, VFBV Board and State Council consider our duty of care to young people to be a moral obligation just as much as it is a legal obligation.

Most of us have tuned into the recent Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and some of you will be aware that amendments to the Victorian Working with Children Act 2005 adopted on 1 August 2017 now place a requirement on some organisations involved in child related activities, and whose people have or are likely to have direct individual contact with children, to have Working with Children Checks (WWCC). Regardless of the limited extra requirements flowing through to VFBV we have decided to err on the side of caution and will take a voluntary participatory approach rather than doing less just because we are not required to do more.

The key elements of VFBV policy includes:

- In addition to meeting any specific legislated WWCC requirements VFBV will also implement and maintain a WWCC requirement for any employees or delegates who engage in or intend to engage in child related VFBV work, have direct contact with children or where contact with children is part of the role;
- Adopting the VFBV Child Safe Code of Conduct spelling out expectations for adults to exhibit appropriate standards towards children at all times and providing guidance on appropriate behaviour to promote the safety and wellbeing of children;
- Establishing a process for responding to and reporting on Child Safe Risks and Child Abuse;
- Establishing a VFBV Child Safe Officer responsible supporting children, investigating complaints, reporting breaches; and Including child safety as a part of VFBV planning and risk assessment processes; and
- Communicating and educating throughout VFBV to ensure expectations are



understood, delivered and held to account.

Thank you for taking the time to read about this important policy and our shared obligation. The VFBV Child Safe Policy is available on the VFBV website for those wishing to review it in detail and further information will be provided at VFBV District Council meetings. VFBV Brigade or Group delegates and anyone else wishing to receive further information should contact your local VFBV State Councillor in the first instance or ring VFBV Office.

As VFBV CEO I am the VFBV Child Safety Officer. People wishing to report an issue should contact the VFBV office and speak to me.

Many of you will have heard that CFA is also looking at its Working with Children Check requirements and whilst this is generating a lot of discussion amongst brigades it is not the focus of my discussion in this article. CFA is currently looking at things it can do regarding ensuring CFA is a safe place for children and part of this recent CFA effort has generated quite some discussion, particularly relating to proposed CFA Working with Children Check requirements.

Unfortunately, CFA did not consult with VFBV in the development of its approach, nor was there any consultation prior to the recent CFA Board decision being made. As a result, I cannot explain how or why CFA decided on the broad-brush approach it now appears to be taking nor can I answer many of the questions being raised by volunteers.

VFBV has raised this as a concern with CFA and we have sought to be more actively engaged in further CFA deliberations on this important matter. We have written to CFA outlining a number of matters of concern that need to be addressed prior to implementation and/or final decision details.

Feedback provided by many volunteers has been raised with CFA and as at this moment CFA's latest advice is that they are still considering what a formal roll out requirement might look like.

## MORE FOR ONLINE SUBSCRIBERS

More than 1,000 VFBV subscribers now receive this page via direct email. You can sign up to receive this information, VFBV's popular Two Minute Briefing from the VFBV/CFA Joint Committees and other information direct to your personal email.

Register at [www.vfbv.com.au](http://www.vfbv.com.au) by clicking on the VFBV Newsletter box.

Our Facebook page is at [www.facebook.com/cfaval](http://www.facebook.com/cfaval) and you can follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/vfbv](https://twitter.com/vfbv) or on Instagram @volunteer\_fire\_brigades\_vic