



# VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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## VFBV VolWel survey

- I feel the time I devote to CFA is productive and worthwhile?
- Most training is available and provided within a reasonable distance from my brigade?
- CFA recognises and utilises the skills and experience I bring to CFA?
- Overall how satisfied are you with your role as a CFA volunteer?

Are these statements important to you? How well are these areas being supported? Make sure that your voice is heard by taking part in the 2019 VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey. (VolWEL)

The VolWEL is an annual snapshot of volunteer opinion and welfare. It has become a critical tool in monitoring short- and long-term trends, and the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at improving CFA volunteer engagement and wellbeing.

The survey is a reliable and important method used to capture the views of volunteers while also tracking trends in volunteer opinion over the years. It is one of the largest surveys of its kind in Australia. As with previous years, VFBV is supporting other volunteer fire associations from across Australia in running the survey within other fire services to gain a national perspective of volunteer views. VFBV is also working with the Victorian SES Volunteers Association (VicSESVA) in offering the survey to VIC-SES members again for 2019 in recognition of the shared respect between CFA and SES volunteers.

There has never been a more important time for CFA volunteers to have their say on how well they think these areas are performing. All answers and comments are confidential, and the results go straight to decision and policy makers.

Visit the VFBV website [www.vfbv.com.au](http://www.vfbv.com.au) to take part in this year's survey. If you do not have internet access, please contact the VFBV office on (03) 9886 1141 and we'll send you a paper copy of the survey to complete.

This year's VolWEL survey will close in October – so make sure your voice is heard and complete the survey today.

## Wellbeing Hotline improvements

Following changes to the CFA Wellbeing Support Hotline VFBV received feedback from volunteers that the hotline had become 'clunky' and at times difficult to navigate. Given callers to the hotline are frequently in distress, the need for simple and clear options is paramount.

The Joint HR, Welfare & OH&S Committee raised these concerns with CFA suggesting possible improvements. These suggestions were well received by CFA, with a commitment to investigate them. At a recent meeting delegates were informed that this feedback has now been implemented with the system now more streamlined.

After calling the hotline on 1800 959 232, members requiring urgent assistance are transferred directly to the Membership Assistance Program (MAP) which is manned 24 hours a day by a psychologist. Members are then able to choose the service they require, including Peer Support, Chaplaincy Support Program and Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) among other services. Delegates welcomed the amalgamation of these valuable services avoiding multiple contact numbers and CFA has agreed to continue working with the committee to monitor and continue discussions on future enhancements.

## Fire season preparedness

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

As at time of writing, significant out of control bushfires burning in Queensland and New South Wales are a stark reminder that this year's Fire Season is rapidly approaching.

This certainly confirms Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) reports that have studied the earliest pre-season day recording a FFDI > 25 between now and 1950, with the data supporting the observation that our fire seasons are starting much earlier, with September featuring very heavily in the data since the early 2000s. The BOM outlook for this season is for an increasing number of high-risk bushfire days, with bushfire activity and heatwave conditions more likely this year compared to the average.

CFA CEO/Chief Officer Steve Warrington has recently set his Chief Officer's expectations and seasonal focus for this year's fire season. Along with the expectation to hit fires hard and fast; ensuring information and community warnings are issued; and backing your training and knowledge to be confident in making decisions; - the highest priority is a focus on the safety of our people.

Amongst this priority is an expectation that all operational members have completed their minimum skills training, have completed the hazardous trees awareness package (every three years) and a reminder of the need to complete the annual entrapment drill.

The annual entrapment drill was first introduced by Chief Officer Ferguson, and CFA have promoted the drill and encouraged participation for many years. Recent data collected by CFA over the last few years has indicated a less than optimal completion of the annual entrapment drill in particular. While this is likely due to under reporting and some early teething problems with CFA's new Learning Management System, it is an issue of significant concern for the Chief, who has asked for VFBV assistance and support in promoting the importance of our annual fire season preparedness.

In discussions with volunteers I have explored the reasons why some members may be resisting this messaging, and in particular the annual entrapment drill. It probably wouldn't surprise anyone, that in the current environment and with the low levels of morale across the service,

Brigade, who knows their members best, having the ability to endorse.

This process then allows the BA conversion training to be recognised as skills maintenance and six monthly currency as a BA wearer on their training records.

This is a good outcome for members and VFBV is hopeful this will alleviate future miss conceptions.

For further information or to seek endorsement documents please contact you District Training Department or VFBV Support Officer Chris Dent [c.dent@vfbv.com.au](mailto:c.dent@vfbv.com.au).

members are particularly sensitive to how the message is delivered, sometimes more so than the message itself – especially as that message gets passed on and delivered at the local level by various people and in various formats and tone.

This is perfectly understandable, and I appreciate many volunteers, and in fact Australian's in general typically have a very low tolerance for 'direction' or anything involving the word 'mandatory.' I often say volunteers are the most generous peoples on the planet, ask them and they will do almost anything – tell them and that good will and generosity will quickly disappear.

Fortunately, the answer to my enquiries predominately confirms the under-reporting or low awareness of the requirement or how to record its completion as the primary reason. However, some responses have indicated an undertow of resistance. Constructive criticism has ranged from apathy and low morale, the appropriateness of the frequency (annual requirement for example), and anger that members of considerable experience and history are being asked to 'prove' something they have done for years, sometimes decades.

This is valuable feedback and has been communicated back to CFA where it has been well received, with a commitment to consider and review the requirements and frequency at the end of each season.

One thing to keep in mind is if you ever have to perform this drill in anger – it will likely be a volatile environment, you and your crew will be stressed and pushed to your limits and the benefit of being able to commit these actions to muscle memory by frequent repetition and just do them automatically may one day save you and your crews life.

To our veteran firefighters I say what a terrific opportunity for you to share some of your experience and knowledge with newer members who would likely deeply appreciate your support and mentoring during their annual drill.

On this point I am reminded of the introduction of minimum skills which faced a very similar backlash. In fact, a couple of years after the introduction of minimum skills it was clear to CFA that the message and 'how' it was introduced was the projects biggest stumbling block. To reset some of this dialog Chief Officer Trevor Roche committed to publicly undergoing his minimum skills training at the 2001 Junior Urban Championships to demonstrate to all members his commitment that everyone should do it. Work place assessors Adrian Hem and Tony Duckmanton were reported as putting the Chief through his paces, and a few weeks later Trevor sat his minimum skills theory and practical assessment at the Senior Urban Championships, where he graduated and received his accreditation certificate for Wildfire.

Knowing Trev very well, I can only say he was likely a



very 'challenging' student and I'm sure Adrian and Tony could enlighten us with their fond memories of this occasion.

The reason I bring up this story is Trevor is still a very committed CFA volunteer and is one of the most compelling advocates for the annual entrapment drill. Trevor recalls the very painful and gut wrenching memories of figuratively sitting around kitchen tables speaking with the families and loved ones of those CFA volunteers that lost their lives during Linton, and explaining what he as Chief Officer was going to do to make sure it never happened again. He gave a solemn promise to ensure that their lives were not lost in vain and that CFA would improve the safety of its members.

Back to the present day, the Chief has made very clear that District Officers must ensure they allocate time and resources to support brigades and groups as a priority to undertake these activities and consider innovative ways to help members complete them.

I was in attendance at a recent volunteer meeting where the Operations Manager offered to provide District spare tankers for any brigade that needed help reaching members, even if that meant him personally dropping by their workplace so members who couldn't attend pre-scheduled training would have an opportunity to perform the quick five minute entrapment drill. These kind of innovate ways to support members should be commended and are a great example of our 'just get on with it' attitude that we are so justifiably proud.

I appreciate the logistical challenges of brigades and members trying to organise times when everyone is available and really want to encourage brigades and groups to consider flexible and innovative ways to cycle members through with the support of their Districts. The Chief has delegated the power for crew leaders to be able to sign off members and as a way to support Captains, OIC's and Group Officers spread the load.

So, could I please press upon members the importance of becoming involved in this year's season preparedness activities and encourage you to support and promote them. One of our most solemn obligations we have to our families and loved ones is to make sure all our people get home safely and this is one small way each of us can demonstrate our commitment to that promise.

## Spectrum changes

Following advice from Telstra that its Spectrum Pre Conferencing service was being discontinued as from January 2020, the VFBV/CFA Joint Communications & Technology Committee has been working with CFA on possible replacements.

Spectrum is used as a redundancy system for Brigades when the paging network fails or is experiencing an outage. A search of the market found seven potential replacement systems with a recommendation of one of the replacement systems being presented for approval shortly.

The recommended system received an endorsement from the Committee and will communicate further information of the system following its acceptance. The committee believe this new system will be very similar in operation to the replaced Spectrum system with some aspects to be managed at the District level for quicker changes.

## 2019/20 VFBV affiliations

Congratulations to the winners of this year's VFBV Affiliation Prize Draw!

All Brigades that paid their 2019/20 affiliations prior to 30th June, 2019, were automatically entered into the prize draw to win their choice of one of four great prizes with a total value of almost \$3,500, and kindly donated by GAAM Emergency Products and Powdersafe.

The lucky winners and their selections were:

1st prize – Douglas Fire Brigade D17 – Pelican torches (Powdersafe)

2nd prize – Baddaginnie Fire Brigade D23 – TFT Break-apart nozzle (GAAM)

3rd prize – Metcalfe Fire Brigade D2 – Hose Roller (GAAM)

4th Prize – Carboor Fire Brigade D23 – Root Soaker (GAAM)

The number of Brigades affiliating with VFBV for 2019/20 is on track to match record numbers of the last two years, a sign of continued strong support for VFBV's

work on behalf of volunteers.

Affiliations were due on the 30th June, 2019, so if you are not sure whether your Brigade or Group's VFBV affiliation and Welfare Fund subscription have been paid, contact your Secretary urgently, as we encourage all those who have not yet affiliated to do so as soon as possible.

For any enquiries, contact your VFBV State Councillors or call us on (03) 9886 1141.

## BA Conversion

VFBV has been fielding many complaints from volunteers experiencing variances and miscommunication from several Districts regarding their ability to attend and complete MSA Breathing Apparatus conversion training for the new BA sets.

Some Districts were advising members they had to redo the whole BA course before they could attend conversion training.

VFBV advocated for a streamlined approach with local Brigades and Captains being able to identify and endorse members to undertake the conversion training and regain currency.

CFA agreed to this and released an endorsement process that includes challenge testing allowing the Brigade Captain/OIC to have the ability to endorse a member to undertake BA conversion training if their six monthly currency has lapsed.

This could be due to multiple reasons and this common sense flexibility now allows a

## Learning Management System enhancements

VFBV representatives on the Joint Training Committee have gained improvements to the Learning Management System (LMS) to lessen the administrative burden on brigades.

In early 2019 CFA created a common link between the Fire Incident Reporting System (FIRS) and LMS so that Breathing Apparatus (BA) worn at Incidents was logged automatically into LMS, capturing not just BA use during training but also incidents. In a further enhancement, the incident date and FIRS incident number will also be captured in the BA Skills History. CFA also added a number of Organisational Development E-Learning packages that members can access; these can be found on LMS.

VFBV will continue to voice members' concerns around the poor interoperability between CFA's various information technology systems.