



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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TRAINING CERTIFICATE UPDATE

Members would remember late last year that VFBV delegates advocated strongly for the resumption of printed training certificates for members when they completed CFA training courses. Delegates advocated that volunteers should be recognised by CFA especially given they were giving up substantial amounts of their own time to undergo the training.

The Committee has been advised that due to administrative error, the backlog of certificates have not yet been sent to Brigades. The certificates have all been printed, and sent to CFA District Offices, with a request from HQ for these to be sent to brigades as soon as possible.

If your brigade is yet to receive them, brigade secretaries or training officers are requested to contact your relevant District Office ASAP.

Structural PPC Cleaning turnaround time

VFBV delegates on the State PPC/E Committee have requested CFA report on average turnaround time of structural PPC that has been sent away for laundering. This follows repeated complaints from Brigades.

CFA has researched the issue and advised that the average turnaround time for the laundry is 48 hours from when the garment is received from the courier. Exceptions to this are for asbestos or contaminated gear, or if a repair is required.

In investigating why

Brigades are reporting longer turnaround times, the Committee has become aware of some Districts implementing local arrangements which has directed courier companies to deliver the laundered PPC to District Offices instead of individual Brigades or their designated pickup locations. The gear is then sitting at District offices with sometimes the individual unaware that their garments have been returned.

VFBV is now investigating these arrangements to determine where they have come

VFBV VoIWeI Survey

This year's Volunteer Survey closed earlier this month. Thank you to all members who participated and did the survey. Thank you also to those members who helped promote this year's survey to your members.

It is clear from the number of responses that Brigades and Groups have worked hard to promote the survey and encouraged members to participate – with this year's figures surpassing last year's.

As soon as the results have been analysed they will be published and we'll share the results.

from, on who's authority and the reasons for this change in practice.

Any systems that add days or sometimes weeks to a member receiving their gear back is unacceptable and needs to be rectified ASAP.

We will report on progress as our investigation continues. Any Brigades that are experiencing delays with having their PPC returned are requested to please contact your local VFBV District Council with date and location information so we can investigate why this is occurring.

CFA SURGE CAPACITY IN ACTION

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Our thoughts and best wishes are with all those communities across NSW and QLD currently impacted by intense bush fire activity.

As I write this month's column, we have over 500 Victorian personnel deployed to assist NSW crews with firefighting, incident management and specialist roles, and that number increases every day. CFA is supplying the lion's share of that contingent with approximately 400 members, with the remainder coming from our partner agencies FFMVic (63) the MFB (26) and additional personnel from other emergency management agencies including the SES.

To put the CFA contribution into perspective – on one day alone we deployed 311 personnel via 11 strike teams. Think about that – with very short notice we have been able to deploy hundreds of members, many hundreds of kilometres away to another State, for multi-day concurrent deployments. Resources included 75 fully crewed vehicles, with the vast majority comprising of tankers and of course hundreds of CFA volunteers. CFA surge capacity in action. No stations left empty and no communities left unprotected while we send people away. Like an elastic band stretching when you need it to – CFA's volunteer surge capacity working exactly as it is designed to.

After factoring in the support Victoria has also provided to Queensland over the last few weeks, more than 730 Victorian personnel have been sent to support our interstate colleagues so far. And while none of these numbers will surprise us, it should be noted that the official start of Summer is still some weeks away.

I want to thank and acknowledge not only the members who have been deployed interstate, but the hundreds of people working behind the scenes to make it possible. And while the fire reports will only list the personnel who were deployed – think of the countless hours, days and sometimes weeks of preparation from Group Officers, Brigade Officers and members who have given up their own time collating availability rosters, distributing and processing the expressions of interest, and planning what trucks can be deployed while at the same time maintaining local coverage.

Now think about the hundreds of volunteers who have arranged with their Brigade to modify their daily routines to increase their availability or arranged flexible hours with their employer so they can be available just in case for local incidents while the brigade has several members deployed interstate. None of these people ever get counted on any official CFA reports.

Now think of all the non-operational members who have arranged support, airport drop off's, rosters and logistics and helped with the avalanche of paperwork that comes with the increase of tempo in our operational and brigade activity. They too are not counted on those official

fire reports or any other CFA system for that matter.

And last but by no means least, think of the hundreds of family members supporting each one of those deployed firefighters – the families, partners and friends pitching in to assist their loved ones. Those left behind while their partner, mother, father, brother or sister is deployed interstate. They are keeping home life on track, managing school drop off's and other family and work commitments. Think of those volunteers who are using their annual leave entitlements to cover their deployment, and the employers who have released many volunteers from their businesses without docking wages – all to help our efforts. The self employed putting their business on hold so they can help these communities in need.

The fact that most of these people are donating their time, their safety and their livelihoods just to pitch in and help their fellow Australians during their time of need should not only be recognised, it should be respected and celebrated.

My point? Official tally's and records as unreliable as they are – will still only be capturing a tiny fraction of the personnel, commitment and contribution required to support these critical operational activities. Don't listen to anyone that tries to talk down CFA's amazing volunteer surge capacity or tries to belittle or qualify the incredible contribution and sacrifices of its volunteers.

This is what makes our CFA so special. Its network across the State, its connectedness with our communities and most importantly – its people – drawn from those very same communities it is there to protect. From those on the front line, to the countless others who are leading, training, supporting, mentoring and assisting in the background.

To everyone that has had a hand in preparing and contributing to the current activity I say thank-you. Each and every one of you are valued and respected and no matter how small or insignificant you think your role or contribution is – it is our collective efforts that make our operational response to these significant events possible, and of this we should all be proud.

Our CFA has yet again stepped up when it was needed the most. And you its people are the backbone of CFA upon which all its successes are built. And given the fire season proper has not even started yet – it looks like we have a long and challenging season ahead of us.

Be proud of yourselves and each other and remind yourselves that this is why we invest so much time, energy and effort into improving CFA and working together to make it a better place to volunteer and work. We don't do it to make ourselves happy – we do it because it is so critically important in our pursuit to protect this State's most important asset – its people. And in the countries most fire prone area, Victoria relies on this sacrifice year in and year



out.

As the focus now moves to our operational activities, keep thinking about those tangible things that would best support and assist you in your roles protecting our communities. Reform planning or discussions won't stop just because we're busy – so we'll need to remain agile and ready to influence those discussions as they occur.

NSW TFB

During this week's high fire danger period, NSW Police are pursuing five individuals over breaches of NSW's state-wide total fire ban. Incredibly, on days where fire agencies warned of catastrophic fire danger, these five individuals were caught using barbecues with an open flame or burning rubbish.

VFBV delegates have been seeking stronger powers and arrangements for Victoria Police to investigate and prosecute TFB offences here in Victoria, including on the spot fines. I am pleased to report that CFA has agreed to support this initiative, with CEO/Chief Officer Steve Warrington AFSM personally backing it. VFBV is extremely grateful for the Chief's support and we will continue to pursue with EMV as we seek the Emergency Management Commissioners support also.

VFBV Quarterly Supplement

I'm thrilled with the inaugural edition of the VFBV Supplement contained in this edition of 'Fire Wise.' This will be a regular feature four times a year and will replace our quarterly mailout. This is just one way we are improving the communication flow between members and sharing the vital work done by hundreds of VFBV delegates across the State who tirelessly and passionately support, represent and advocate for CFA volunteers.

I commend this initiative to you and hope you find it informative and interesting.

Presumptive Legislation

The first volunteer applications under Presumptive Legislation will be decided on this month. Like many volunteers, we will be looking to see how these new processes are working and if the results from these first cases match the promises and commitments made, especially in relation to the panel that will decide on volunteer cases.

VFBV is continuing to support applicants, and anyone contemplating lodging a claim under Presumptive Legislation is encouraged to make contact with the VFBV Welfare Fund Secretary so we can support you through the process. The Welfare Fund Secretary can be reached on (03) 9886 1141.

New Volunteer Nominee to CFA Board

VFBV welcomes the announcement of Beth Davidson as the fourth volunteer nominee to CFA Board. Beth is a CFA volunteer of Anglesea Brigade, where she has served as a non-operational member for more than 36 years and has been heavily involved with fire prevention committees and community education.

Beth has over 30 years' experience in senior leadership and governance roles in CFA, Local Government and the non-government sector, and has served previously on the CFA Board as a municipal representative from 2004-2007.

She has been appointed to the position of Mayor four consecutive terms over her 11 years with the Surf Coast Shire and led the Council over a particularly challenging period post a Commission of Inquiry that required rebuilding and regaining community confi-

dence. She has also served as President of the Board of the Victorian Local Governance Association between 2005 – 2009. Since 2011, Beth has devoted considerable energy to Neighbourhood House and has served three terms as President of the Barwon Network of Neighbourhood Centres.

On behalf of the VFBV Board and State Council – please join us in congratulating Beth, who joins Peter Shaw, Dawn Hartog and Kent Griffin who were all appointed to the CFA Board in August 2019. VFBV is confident that given their combined extensive breadth, experience and skills within the volunteer ranks, together they provide significant experience and capability to the CFA Board and will make a valuable contribution to the future CFA on behalf of volunteers.

MENTAL HEALTH INJURY PILOT

In June of this year, the State Government launched a pilot to provide emergency workers (volunteers and staff) with access to provisional payments for their mental health injuries. This pilot enables eligible current and former CFA volunteers to access payments for the reasonable cost of medical and like expenses for their CFA related mental health injury covered by the pilot for up to 13 continuous weeks from the date they submit their claim.

This allows CFA volunteers to access reimbursement for medical treatment and services while their claim is being assessed and for an extended period even where their claim is rejected. The pilot is being offered to not only CFA members, but VicPol, Ambulance Victoria, MFB, ESTA, DELWP and other emergency related public sector employees including registered nurses. The pilot is funded by the Emergency Services Workers and Volunteers Mental Health Support Fund, which has been established by the Department of Justice and Community Safety for the purposes of this pilot.

For volunteers, CFA will provide all paperwork and case management, and will reimburse eligible members for treatment costs. CFA will then be reimbursed by the pilot. The pilot will cover expenses such as consultation with your GP, the cost of prescription medication and consultations with a psychologist and/or psychiatrist.

VFBV encourages any member who may be

experiencing a mental health injury or trauma such as PTSD, depression or anxiety that has been caused by CFA service to make contact with the CFA wellbeing team, and consider accessing the provisional payments pilot. A claim form is available from your CFA District Office, and VFBV has requested the forms also be made available online. Any members having difficulty accessing the pilot should make contact with a VFBV State Councillor or Support Officer for assistance.

Further details on the pilot can be found on the VFBV website or via www.vic.gov.au/provisional-payments

Online Systems Closure

CFA has advised that the online systems for Healthwatch (HW) and the Healthy for Life Program (HFLP) are being closed. These online systems were available for participants in these programs to access and download their personal historical data. The services themselves are to continue – it is just the online portals that are being closed.

If members wish to retrieve their historical data, they will need to access the system before 14th January 2020. CFA has provided instructions on how to do this, which is available from the VFBV website. Members who need assistance or have any questions can contact the Healthwatch team at healthwatch@cfa.vic.gov.au or the Healthy For Life Program team at hflp@cfa.vic.gov.au