

SPRING 2024

Community Matters

VICSES

EDITION 28

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Chelsea Unit junior member Lachlan.



MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES

Welcome to the spring 2024 edition of *Community Matters*.

It's been a busy winter period keeping the community safe, with our dedicated VICSES volunteers responding to over 8,000 requests for assistance for flood and storm related incidents - an incredible effort.

In June, I was pleased to recognise Thank a First Responder Day – a national day of appreciation for first responders and their families. The Victorian Government supports the important contributions of our first responders, including our VICSES volunteers. I extend my gratitude to all first responders for their remarkable efforts as we continue to work together towards a safer Victoria.

I recently joined VICSES Chief Officer Operations Tim Wiebusch, Unit Controller John Koutros, and volunteers in Kilmore to announce the beginning of a new facility for the Kilmore Unit. The concept designs are underway, and the new facility is expected to be ready for members in mid-2027.

I was delighted to see the opening of the new state-of-the-art VICSES Wonthaggi Unit headquarters. Thank you to Member for Bass, Jordan Crugnale MP, who

formally opened the facility on my behalf in July. With these terrific new headquarters, Wonthaggi members will be even better placed to support their local communities in times of need.

Thank you to all the VICSES members who rolled up their sleeves to donate much-needed blood and plasma as part of the Emergency Services Blood Challenge from June through to August. The annual Australian Red Cross Lifeblood blood drive aims to boost blood supplies – especially important during the winter months, when donations typically dwindle due to seasonal illnesses. It's always fantastic to see members from a range of emergency services agencies banding together, even outside of their day-to-day roles, to support those who need it the most. VICSES alone contributed 359 donations, saving 1,077 lives, which is something to be incredibly proud of.

Emerging from winter into the warmer months, we will face an increased risk of spring rain and the potential for flooding across the state. As always, we will ensure our high standard of emergency preparedness and response capabilities across the sector to keep our communities safe.

Thank you, take care, and all the best for the season ahead.



Jaclyn Symes
Minister for
Emergency Services



Welcome

Hello everyone, and welcome to the spring edition of *Community Matters*.

In June I was pleased to be able to attend the opening of our brand-new Wonthaggi Unit headquarters. With this exciting new facility now up and running, our Wonthaggi Unit volunteers will be even better equipped to serve their community with increased emergency response capabilities, and ample space for training and future unit growth. You can read more about this terrific new facility on page 9.

I also had the pleasure of attending the 2024 State Controllers' Seminars, located in Creswick (Western Region) and Healesville (Eastern Region). These were fantastic events focused on fostering leadership skills, strategic collaboration, and networking, and it was wonderful to meet with many unit leaders face-to-face. You can read more about these events on page 10-11.

Congratulations to our Stawell Unit members Graeme Edwards and Leigh Edwards who have reached an incredible 50-year milestone at VICSES. Graeme and Leigh both originally joined Civil Defence in 1972, which then became VICSES in 1975. This achievement showcases an extraordinary level of dedication to our service and the wider community, and it is privilege to

have such devoted volunteers as part of our membership. You can read more about their journey on page 20.

Finally, on the back of International Youth Day in August, I'd like to take the time to recognise the amazing contributions of our junior members and wider youth membership at VICSES. As the leaders of tomorrow, our youth membership is a core part of our organisation and our units in supporting our day-to-day operational activities and the community. This includes members like Molly Ferguson from our Frankston Unit, who was recently awarded Young Victorian of the Year for her exceptional dedication to the safety of others through her volunteering with VICSES and as a foster carer. You can read more about our incredible youth members on pages pages 4-5, 16 and 17.

Thank you for all your contributions to this edition of *Community Matters*. I hope you enjoy this edition and stay safe.

Kind regards,

Greg Leach
CEO Victoria State
Emergency Service

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The Victoria State Emergency Service respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

Authorised and published by Victoria State Emergency Service, 168 Sturt Street, Southbank, Victoria.
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FEATURE

International Youth Day: Highlighting our junior members

By Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO

At VICSES, our junior members are aged 15 – 18 years. Junior members can join units which are junior accredited, meaning they are specially equipped to support young people in their VICSES journey.

While junior members attend select operational activities under supervision and in a controlled environment, the training they receive is on the same level as regular members. They also receive the same Personal Protective Clothing and Equipment as other members.

Our junior members are exposed to a range of scenarios including:

- General rescue
- Storm response
- Flood rescue
- Community engagement

We spoke to some of our amazing junior members to find out more about what it's like being a young person at VICSES and what they like about their roles!



Join now

If you're interested in joining a VICSES unit as a junior member, or know a young person who might be, contact us to find your nearest junior accredited unit.



Lachlan

17-year-old Lachlan is a junior member at the Chelsea Unit who is currently completing year 12. He started volunteering with us two years ago when he moved to the area, so that he could get to know his local community and give them a helping hand.

"As a junior member I can perform mostly the same duties as regular members, and I attend training every week where we learn practical and theoretical skills to be applied on the job. I also respond to a range of call outs, like trees that have fallen down and pose a risk, or a broken roof that needs an emergency fix to keep the water out" said Lachlan.

Lachlan takes pride in being able to use the skills gained in his SES training to help others in his community.

"One of the jobs I was most proud of was one of my first call outs ever - a tree had fallen in an elderly lady's yard, and she was unable to leave her property, so we came by and removed the tree. It was a very simple job but by far my favourite as we were able to help someone when they needed assistance."

We're so proud to have dedicated junior members like Lachlan who have a passion for supporting their community in our service.



Lily

17-year-old Lily followed in her grandparents' footsteps when she became a volunteer at the Kyabram Unit.

"Both of my grandparents are VICSES volunteers so when my Nanna died, I joined to spend some more time with my Pa and I loved it," she said.

Lily enjoys being able to join her team on call outs outside of school hours where she is treated just like any other volunteer.

"As a junior member I basically do same as the others at my unit with just the right amount of extra support which is awesome so I go out on callouts whenever I can, and I participate in weekly training nights," said Lily.

Lily also values the training component of her role.

"I am pretty proud of my qualifications that I have achieved over the last few years for example my Crew Member 2, Rescue Boat Deckhand and Safe Work at Heights (on ground) were the best courses to do as I now have more knowledge I can use out in the field and at my age it's pretty sweet to have this experience," said Lily.

We really admire her passion for learning and using her skills to support her local community.

Our junior membership:

We currently have

109

junior members across the state.

The unit with the most junior members is the Frankston Unit with

29

in their team.

The Metro South Region has the most junior members

35

followed by the Hume Region

26.



Connor

Inspired by the severe storm events affecting Victoria in 2021, the now 17-year-old Connor joined the Hastings Unit as a junior member.

"I joined to learn new skills I'd otherwise not learn, get out of my comfort zone a little bit, do and see some really cool things, and have a positive influence in my local community," he said.

Connor particularly enjoys the teamwork aspect of his role and working alongside our emergency services partners.

"Multi-agency responses are always a highlight to me because I get to be part of a team that is working towards one goal," he said.

Being a junior member has given Connor the opportunity to upskill in a range of areas.

"By being part of the Hastings Unit I've had positive role models to look up to and learn important skills about communication and teamwork. Young people should 100% look into joining their local units, it's been an opportunity I'm really glad to have taken up," he said.

It is terrific to see Connor's passion for teamwork and taking on new experiences which he brings to his role at the Hastings Unit. ■

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GENERAL NEWS

VICSES members roll up their sleeves for Australia-wide blood drive

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO

From 1 June through to 31 August, VICSES volunteers and staff rolled up their sleeves to provide life-saving support of a different kind over winter, as part of Australia Red Cross Lifeblood's Emergency Services Blood Drive.



This annual campaign unites emergency services donors from across the country, during a period when many regular blood donors are impacted by colds and flu.

With blood and plasma donations in significant demand across the country, emergency service members nation-wide were encouraged to build on the 8,200 donors who supported the drive in 2023, when more than 13,900 donations were made.

VICSES Assistant Chief Officer, Readiness, Mark Cattell joined emergency service partner agencies at Lifeblood Australia's Melbourne CBD Donor Centre to launch the initiative, alongside VICSES Essendon and Heidelberg Unit volunteers John Bates and Emina Susic.

“Donating blood products is another easy way for VICSES personnel to give back to their community and make a life-saving difference, as often as they like. It’s always fantastic to see VICSES’ orange uniforms feature prominently at donation centres across the state,” said Mark.

Blood donations are subsequently used to treat patients facing a range of medical conditions, including cancer, severe anaemia, complications during childbirth, trauma and recovering from surgery.

A total of 18 different life-saving treatments are also developed through plasma donations, with up to 15 different plasma donations sometimes required to make a single dose of some specific plasma medicines.

Across the country, Lifeblood requires 1.6 million donations each year to meet demand for blood and blood products, equating to one blood donation every 18 seconds.

Throughout their lifetime, one in three Australians are expected to require blood or blood products, however, only one in 30 Australians donate. ■

Female Unit Controllers leave their mark on local history

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO

Female leaders at units throughout the state are continuing to make their mark at VICSES.

For new Unit Controllers Emily Hooke (Maryborough Unit) and Brooke Bird (Frankston Unit), the recent ascension to their local unit's top job is one for the history books, marking the first time a female has held the position at either unit.

Both units, however, have a long history of female involvement, with VICSES Maryborough Unit boasting a near-even spread of male and female volunteers, while 75% of VICSES Frankston Unit's current command structure is female.

For Emily, her rise through the ranks was the result of persistent encouragement from within the unit, with fellow volunteers imploring her to pursue leadership pathways which would capitalise on her natural knack for command.

As the eldest of three children, Emily felt she always had the ability to be a “mother duck”, but, after joining Life Saving Victoria's 'Ready to Lead' program, gained an improved understanding of her own leadership capabilities and how best to glean from her array of VICSES mentors.

Emily attributes much of her recent growth within VICSES to her “Personal Board of Directors”, which includes former Maryborough Unit Controller Darren Cooper, current VICSES Fawkner Unit Controller Goldie Pergl, and outgoing Wedderburn Controller Mike Bagnall.

These relationships have also assisted Emily in seamlessly taking on her own role as Unit Controller and lay the foundation for the unit command to strengthen its connection to nearby VICSES units and other emergency service partners.

Emily has also set her sights on making VICSES Maryborough Unit more accessible for junior-age volunteers, as well as building the unit's skilled membership base in the short term.

“Walking down the street and having people recognise me as the VICSES Maryborough Unit Controller is amazing. It's fantastic to be identified as not just a leader in the community, but as a female leader,” she said.



In Melbourne's southeast, Brooke had always wanted to give back to her community in whichever way she could.

Her decision to join VICSES Frankston Unit was made more than 14 years ago, piqued by a desire to begin donating her time rather than purely monetarily.

Under the guidance of long-time VICSES Frankston Unit Controller Brian McMannis, Brooke gradually took on more and more responsibility within the near 60-year-old local unit, working to further develop the units' training focus and build member capability.

Now the main face of a unit which boasts a membership already more than 50% female, Brooke hopes her management approach will make VICSES Frankston Unit even more accessible to local women.

Having commenced her initial two-year stint as Unit Controller last month in the wake of an extended

period as Acting Unit Controller, Brooke aims to further strengthen Frankston as a sustainable unit, with an eye to growing the unit's leadership focus and building engagement with the community over the coming years.

Aided by an experienced network of fellow VICSES volunteers and staff, Brooke also plans to maintain Frankston's exemplary service record, which has seen the unit respond to almost 1,000 requests for assistance in the last 12 months.

“It's a really exciting time to be involved with VICSES Frankston Unit, and as volunteers we're all excited to continue to turn out in support of our communities,” she said.

Congratulations to Emily and Brooke on their new leadership roles! We can't wait to see their units go from strength to strength under their direction. ■

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GENERAL NEWS

VICSES/AAMI Partnership: An unwavering ally in our mission to serve Victoria



By Tracey White, Senior Adviser Publicity, Events and Partnerships, VHO

For over two decades, the partnership between VICSES and AAMI has been a cornerstone of our ability to serve the Victorian community effectively. Since the partnership's inception in 2002, AAMI has contributed over \$10 million, making a significant impact on our operations, volunteer support, and community engagement efforts.

Strengthening our volunteer force

AAMI's funding has directly supported initiatives like the current 'Join Us' campaign, which plays a crucial role in recruiting new volunteers across Victoria. With tailored radio advertising, boosted posts on social media, and fresh promotional materials, AAMI's backing has helped us extend our reach into rural and regional communities, which is vital in ensuring that VICSES remains strong and resilient statewide.

Equipping us for success

Over the years, AAMI's generosity has equipped our units with over 20,000 pieces of operational equipment, ensuring that our volunteers are always prepared for the diverse challenges they face. One standout achievement is the introduction of custom-made Personal Protective Clothing (PPC) for female volunteers, ensuring that all our members are equipped with gear that is not only functional but also fit for purpose.

Building a resilient community together

One of the most impactful aspects of our partnership is the joint effort to enhance community preparedness. AAMI has funded several campaigns, including

a new preparedness initiative aimed at educating the public on home safety during floods and storms. This campaign includes an interactive webpage and a substantial media push, ensuring that our messages reach as many Victorians as possible. Look out for

our new interactive campaign on our public website in October.

Our partnership with AAMI also affords us the opportunity to have a presence at large events that we would not otherwise be able to attend, such as the Royal Melbourne Show.

The success of our Wear Orange Wednesday (WOW Day) campaign would not be possible without the generous support of AAMI. Their funding enables VICSES to extend our message of gratitude and acknowledgment to volunteers across Victoria, ensuring that their hard work and dedication is



recognised publicly. Through our partnership with AAMI, we were able to secure exposure across live weather crosses on the Today Show, an impactful 'Get Ready With Me' campaign social media, WOW Day banner flags across metro and regional locations, and over 80 roadside digital billboards. This kind of exposure amplifies our ability to thank our volunteers on a grand scale, making sure their contributions are celebrated throughout the state.

Looking ahead

As we continue to navigate new challenges and opportunities, our partnership with AAMI remains a critical asset. With upcoming initiatives like new storm trailers, expanded community engagement campaigns, and a commitment to funding the Driver Reviver Program, AAMI's support ensures that VICSES can continue to fulfill its mission with excellence.

The partnership between VICSES and AAMI is more than just a corporate agreement; it is a shared commitment to building a safer, more resilient Victoria. Together, we will continue to support our volunteers and serve our communities, proving that when we join forces, we can achieve great things. ■

State-of-the-art headquarters unveiled for VICSES Wonthaggi Unit

By Ryan Malcom, Media Advisor, VHO



A new state-of-the-art headquarters for VICSES Wonthaggi Unit volunteers is set to provide local members with increased capacity to manage emergencies along Victoria's Bass Coast.

The new development, which was formally opened by Bass MP Jordan Crugnale on behalf of the Minister for Emergency Services on Saturday, boasts a host of modern amenities including four drive-through motor bays and a 42 locker turn-out room.

Situated at a new location on White Road, the brand-new VICSES Wonthaggi Unit also houses training and welfare rooms, office space, a communications room, kitchen, and features secure CCTV and backup generator systems, a rainwater tank and is wired for future solar energy use.

"This new facility promises to provide a major boost to the VICSES Wonthaggi Unit response capability and the community it serves" said VICSES Chief Officer Operations, Tim Wiebusch.

The procurement of new land for the VICSES Wonthaggi Unit was initially announced as a commitment of the 2018/19 State Budget.

"It's fantastic to welcome our community into our new home, which has been a brilliant addition to the resourcing of our local unit" said Wonthaggi Unit Controller, Jarrod Hargreaves.

Celebrating its 48th anniversary this year, VICSES Wonthaggi Unit has a strong local volunteer base, with members receiving more than 70 requests for assistance (RFAs) in the last 12 months.

With the Bass Coast historically subject to significant flood and storm events, VICSES Wonthaggi Unit volunteers have been kept busy in recent times, receiving more than 400 RFAs since 2019.

Local VICSES volunteers are also principal Road Crash Rescue providers along the Bass Coast area, working closely with Ambulance Victoria, Victoria Police and fire services in the local area to support their communities in times of emergency.

"Our VICSES volunteers play a vital role supporting communities across the Bass Coast region in times of emergency, and it's important they have a modern fit for purpose headquarters from which to provide their important service" said Tim.

The new facility is expected to bolster VICSES Wonthaggi Unit's relationship with these partner agencies and nearby VICSES units, serving as a modern training base and meeting facility for the area. ■

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CAMPAIGNS & EVENTS

VICSES State Controllers' Seminars: Fun, connection, and leadership magic!

By Tracey White, Senior Advisor Publicity, Events and Partnerships, VHO

June was an exciting month for VICSES as we hosted two back-to-back State Controllers' Seminars, aiming to uplift our Unit Controllers, and Deputy Controllers. These power-packed events were held on 15 June at RACV Goldfields in Creswick for the Western Region and on 22 June at RACV Healesville for the Eastern Region. The goal? Empower our leaders, swap essential strategic information, and create some fantastic networking opportunities.

The seminars kicked off with a bang! Our much-loved 'On The Couch With Leaders' session made a grand return. Hosted by VICSES Chief Officer Operations (COO) Tim Wiebusch, this session

featured VICSES Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Greg Leach, VICSES Board Chair Jasmine Doak, and Emergency Management Commissioner Rick Nugent. They shared their toughest challenges and top focus areas for the coming

years, sprinkling in some golden leadership and motivation tips. Next up, our CEO Greg Leach took the stage and dove into an extremely popular breakdown of the 24/25 Budget, service funding, and what it all means for our volunteers. Attendees loved the transparency and clarity—nothing was off the table!

The seminars were packed with sessions on fleet management, Physical Fitness for Role, and an update on facilities by VICSES Executive Director Kate White. Assistant Chief Officer (Western Region), Anthony McLean also introduced the new membership application process, now known as 'VICSES Onboard,' a hit among attendees!

One of the standout features of the seminars was the volunteer-led panel sessions. Western seminar attendees got valuable insights from Fawkner Controller Goldie Pergl and Colac Unit's Steve Tevelin, while the Eastern seminar spotlighted Hastings Controller Dutchy Holland and Upper Yarra Controller Hannah Brunton. These panels covered everything from first-term controller lessons to succession planning, engaging councils, and leadership and recruitment. The feedback? Pure inspiration!

The feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive. Attendees loved the leadership insights, the opportunity to connect with new leaders, and the openness from VICSES leadership. Many felt these were the best seminars yet, highlighting the chance to ask questions and the commitment shown by presenters.

Here's what some of our participants had to say:

- "The panel speakers were amazing and inspirational."
- "I gained important insights into our leaders' journeys and their lessons learned."
- "It was great to have the opportunity to ask questions and engage directly with our leaders."



VICSES celebrates five years of the Emergency Service Match

By Tracey White, Senior Advisor Publicity, Events and Partnerships, VHO

On 18 August, the AFL Emergency Services Match made a spectacular return for 2024, celebrating and thanking the amazing people across our emergency services sector. Now in its fifth year, this exciting event saw Hawthorn Football Club go head-to-head with Richmond Football Club in a Round 23 showdown at the MCG. The Hawks decimated Richmond in the first quarter, slamming on seven goals in the space of just 11 minutes to take the convincing win.

VICSES members were in full force at the Emergency Services Fan Zone, joining our agency partners to provide a fun-filled day for families and fans. The zone was packed with free activities, including displays, vehicles, recruitment info, games, and more. Paddy the Platypus was a crowd favourite, bringing endless joy to the kids.

Members from all emergency services formed a guard of honour for the Hawthorn players as they charged onto the field amidst a dazzling display of fireworks. The crowd's cheer when VICSES members took to the field for the halftime Lap of Honour was truly heart-warming.

The event also paid tribute to the efforts of Emergency Management Victoria, Ambulance Victoria, Fire Rescue Victoria,



Victoria Police, Country Fire Authority, Life Saving Victoria, Forest Fire Management Victoria, Triple Zero, St John Ambulance, Red Cross, the Victoria Council of Churches, and Marine Search and Rescue.

With all proceeds going to the Emergency Services Foundation, a massive thank you goes out to everyone involved in the Fan Zone and those who participated in the afternoon's events at the MCG. A perfect Melbourne sunny winters day was enjoyed by all. ■



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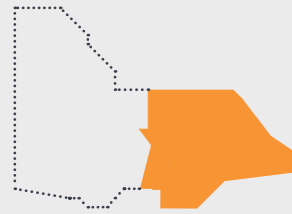
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EASTERN REGION

1 April – 30 June 2024

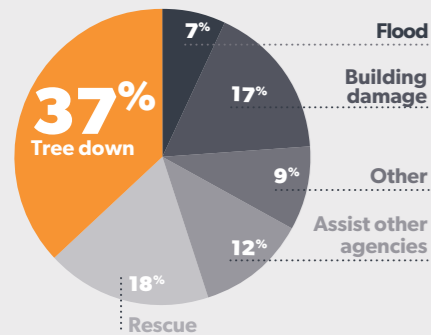


2,847

Volunteers

2,416

Requests for assistance



Tambo Valley Unit team flourishes

By Rachel Rogers, Community Resilience Coordinator, Eastern Region

On the weekend of 20 July 2024, the number of responding Tambo Valley members doubled after three of their newest recruits passed their Crew Member Level 2 accreditation.

Unit Controller Shane Peach initially encouraged Hayden, Michael and Dale to come along to fortnightly training and put their skills in heavy diesel mechanics, rock climbing and communications to good use. They have

really flourished throughout their training, taking on a range of challenges and learning opportunities.

In May, some of Bruthen’s experienced members went up the hill to help Tambo Valley to facilitate Crew Member Supervised

scenarios to the new recruits. In a twist of fate, it was cut short when a Road Crash Rescue took the qualified members away to support patient transportation by helicopter at Tambo Crossing.

In June, the new Tambo Valley members revisited the Crew Member Supervised scenarios at the new Omeo Mountain Bike Track while local children utilised the lighting component and rode some of the track at night.

Hayden, Michael and Dale are looking to continue their development by attending unit training at Tambo Valley and Bruthen Units and are excited about adding Chainsaw Operating and 4 Wheel Driving to their rapidly growing skill set.

It is terrific to see units building making new connections in their local community and expanding their teams so they can better support each other and their local area. Great work Tambo Valley! ■



Monash Unit braves the Polar Plunge

By Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO

In a frosty Saturday morning in August, a group of our VICSES Monash Unit members braved the cold, diving into the icy waters (9.6 degrees to be exact) off South Melbourne beach.

The Polar Plunge, led by the Law Enforcement Torch Run, encourages participants to be bold and get cold to raise money for the amazing athletes of Special Olympics Australia.

We are proud to see our members supporting a great cause! ■

Far East Communities Embrace Flood Class Level Changes

By Merryn Henderson, Community Resilience Coordinator, Eastern Region

On Tuesday 16 July 2024, key stakeholders and agency personnel from VICSES, East Gippsland Shire Council and East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority who have been part of the Flood Class Level Review project, joined the far East Gippsland communities of Genoa and Mallacoota at several pop-up sessions. These sessions provided a forum for interested community members to review and discuss the recent flood class level changes implemented at the end of 2023.

The flood class level changes under review impact the Genoa Valley, Mallacoota and Wangarabell communities. The pop-up sessions created an opportunity for all interested community members to seek further information, resources and extent mapping for the new Minor, Moderate and Major flood class levels on the Genoa River at The Gorge Gauge.

These final two community consultations conclude stage one of the East Gippsland Flood Class Level Review Project. It is anticipated that stage two will commence in the coming months, with the adoption of new Flood Class Levels on Bemm, Cann and Tambo River systems. ■



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EASTERN REGION

Corryong Unit volunteers pass major training milestone

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO

VICSES volunteers responsible for managing emergencies in some of the state's most remote alpine terrain have passed a major milestone in their journey to see the unit become fully operational again.

The VICSES Corryong Unit, which is relied upon to respond to incidents along the Murray River and throughout the remote Nariel Valley in northeast Victoria, ceased Road Crash Rescue (RCR) operations last year due to a shortage of qualified volunteers.

However, with a new cohort of local members having successfully completed Crew Member Level 2 (CM2) training earlier this month, plans to bring the unit back online before the end of the year are well on track.

The dedicated group of VICSES Corryong Unit volunteers have trained on a weekly basis over the last six months, building proficiency in a range of key skills and developing camaraderie.

The recent CM2 training, which was supported by VICSES Eastern Region staff and specialist VICSES trainers from throughout the northeast, taught volunteers

how to manage storm events and introduced the idea of working at heights.

Designated as a principal RCR unit alongside more than 100 other VICSES units across the state, VICSES Corryong Unit volunteers will now progress to completing specialist RCR and chainsaw proficiency training before being accredited to attend requests for assistance in support of their community.

Dan Walton, VICSES Operations Officer Lead Trainer, North East said "we're looking forward to continuing to work with VICSES Corryong Unit volunteers with an eye to re-accrediting the unit for RCR response before the end of the year."

In the interim, VICSES Corryong Unit has received significant support from VICSES Tallangatta and Wodonga Unit volunteers, as well as from NSW SES units from across the Murray River, with the



northeast community banding behind the embattled local unit.

The outpouring of support stemmed from a major recruiting drive in the town late last year, which saw several prospective volunteers come together to revitalise the Corryong Unit following a town meeting.

David Yule, VICSES Corryong Unit Controller said, "it's exciting for our volunteers to be seeing their hard work drive the unit forward, and they're all determined to play their

role in bringing this vital service back to the Corryong community."

The efforts of the current training cohort promise to improve VICSES' capacity throughout the northeast; however, additional operational and administrative volunteers are still required to ensure the sustainability of the VICSES Corryong Unit into the future.

"We hope to have the unit back online and serving our response area in the very near future," said David. ■



Corryong Unit inspires tomorrow's emergency preparedness leaders

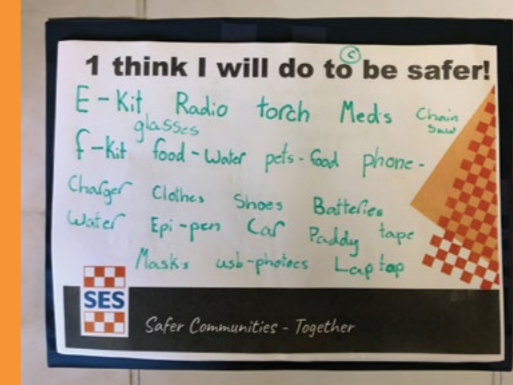


By Glenn Mercer, Community Resilience Coordinator, Eastern Region

Following the North East Emergency Action Group (NEEAG) expo held last year, the Corryong community have workshopped further activities to promote emergency resilience in their local area.

These activities included short sessions with school students to equip our upcoming generation with crucial skills in emergency preparedness and safety.

This idea came to life when on Friday 21 June, grade 5 and 6 students from Corryong College and Sacred Heart Primary School were visited by VICSES, Ambulance Victoria, Country Fire



Authority and Victoria Police. The agencies conducted an exciting line up of engaging workshops.

A fantastic presentation on being prepared for an emergency was facilitated by VICSES Corryong Unit member Kay Paton, Wodonga Unit Community Engagement Facilitator Hayden Middlin and Community Resilience Coordinator Glenn Mercer. The team had a productive discussion with the students on what they believed should be packed in an emergency kit. They also brainstormed one thing students could do to be safer in the case of an emergency and created posters to help them remember and spread the word.

These posters were placed in the students' classrooms after the sessions. To top off a fun day of learning and discussion, students also participated in a line search to find Paddy in the school library.

Teachers asked students a few days later what preparations they had made at home, including discussions held with family on what they can do to be better prepared for an emergency.

It is terrific to see our fabulous Corryong Unit members out and about, educating our future emergency preparedness leaders on how they can keep themselves and each other safe. ■

Land unveiled for brand-new VICSES Kilmore Unit facility

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO

A new state-of-the-art headquarters is set to be constructed for VICSES Kilmore Unit, thanks to a major funding initiative coordinated by the State Government.

The new facility, which will be developed on both parts of the existing site and land immediately adjacent to the unit's existing

Green Street location, will provide additional space for volunteers and improve the ability of members to support their communities in times of emergency.

VICSES Chief Operations Officer Tim Wiebusch joined Emergency Services Minister The Hon. Jaclyn Symes, Kilmore Unit volunteers, and representatives from the Community Building Safety Authority, where the land for the new facility was officially unveiled.

"VICSES Kilmore Unit volunteers play a vital role in their community, and once built, we look forward to being able to welcome more community members to join as volunteers and support their community during times of emergency," said Tim.

VICSES Kilmore Unit members have been among the state's most called-upon in recent times, with local volunteers responding to more than 425 requests for assistance (RFAs) in each of the last two financial years.

With population growth in the area expected to continue in the coming years, the new facility is expected to cater to the further growth of the local volunteer-base and allow VICSES to continue to fulfil its commitment to supporting its community and emergency service partners.

Having been operating from their current Green Street premises since the unit's inception in 1981, it's anticipated the new facility will be opened in mid-2026. ■

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Frankston Unit volunteer named Young Victorian of the Year

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO

VICSES Frankston Unit volunteer, Molly Fergus, has been named the recipient of the prestigious Young Victorian of the Year Award, acknowledging her commitment as a volunteer in the community and as a foster carer.

Announced at a ceremony held by the Victoria Day Council at Melbourne Town Hall, the Young Victorian of the Year Award has acknowledged the outstanding efforts of young Victorians in the community and public service each year since 1996.

Molly is widely respected as a VICSES volunteer with the Frankston Unit, rising through the

ranks as a mentor and regularly supporting her community in times of emergency since joining the service two years ago.

During that time, Molly has attended more than 500 requests for assistance with the local unit, with her foster children a regular feature at unit events and training evenings in their miniature VICSES uniforms.

Since becoming an accredited foster carer in 2017, Molly has left a profound impact on her community by caring for 45 children, providing unwavering love and support throughout, and forging a reputation of going above and beyond the typical responsibilities of a carer.

This commitment is exemplified by her care of Hannah*, a young girl who entered Molly's care in 2020 as a six-month-old as part of Molly's involvement with independent not-for-profit, OzChild.

Managing Hannah's significant health challenges, including cerebral palsy and a compromised immune system, Molly has supported Hannah through medical appointments and dozens of hospital admissions to ensure she receives the best possible care.

Molly also successfully advocated for Hannah's newborn sister Bianca* to be placed in her care as a two-day old, in turn ensuring the siblings could be kept together.

Molly's selfless dedication to her bayside community is multi-faceted and leaves a positive impact on each of the lives she touches.

"I'm thankful to VICSES for the care and support it has provided to my foster children and I. Foster carers



Wangaratta Unit celebrates dedicated member Fran

By Wangaratta Unit, Eastern Region



On 6 August 1983 - 41 years ago, when a flood had impacted the Wangaratta community, local resident Fran Whitehead decided to join the Wangaratta Unit so she could lend a helping hand.

As part of her role at VICSES, Fran was on call 24/7 to respond to floods, storms, road incidents, land search and boat rescues, all over a period of 35 years.

An event that stands out to Fran to this day is attending a significant bus crash in 1993.

Fran continues to help out around our unit doing admin and finance. She is also our team captain for our Step It Up team, motivating members to keep fit and healthy.

Congratulations Fran on your wonderful achievement supporting your local community for all these years. From all past and present members, we say thank you. ■

don't do what we do alone, and it's been fantastic to be so welcomed by a 'second family' at the VICSES Frankston Unit.

"I'm very humbled by the award, and hope to continue making a positive impact on the community into the future" said Molly.

VICSES Senior Assistant Chief Officer, Ray Jasper said "Molly is a fantastic example of the values we love to see in our VICSES volunteers. She's a selfless young individual who is always looking for ways to positively impact her community.

At VICSES, we are extremely proud of members such as Molly, who embody the VICSES values by being pillars of their community, extraordinarily intertwined in their local area. ■

*Names of children have been changed for privacy reasons.



Fran

Leongatha Youth Night



By Kristen Muir, Deputy Controller, Leongatha Unit

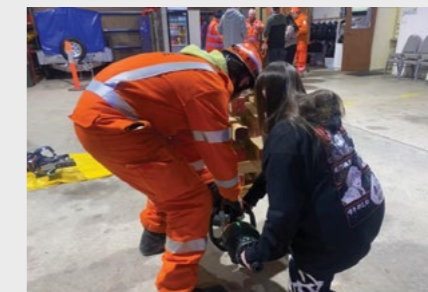
On 31 July, Leongatha Unit held an awesome Youth Night which included eight of our amazing junior members.

After a quick introduction, we got the night underway with a tricky team building activity – spaghetti and marshmallow towers. Whoever built the highest tower using these two unlikely materials was the winner! There were some pretty high towers built however only one ended up staying upright, which happened to be the shortest tower there.

With our tower-building skills well and truly tested, we moved onto some operational activities during which juniors got to work together with current members. We taught them knot tying, sandbagging and causality handling, including how our trusty Mule works.

Most of our juniors enjoyed the hydraulic tools the most, which we used for a large game of Jenga and egg races (thankfully, using ping pong balls instead of eggs is much easier to clean up!).

The jam-packed schedule of activities concluded with Junior Members taking home signup sheets and eager to come to the next training night! It was an awesome success and we're looking forward to holding the next one. ■





WESTERN REGION

1 April – 30 June 2024

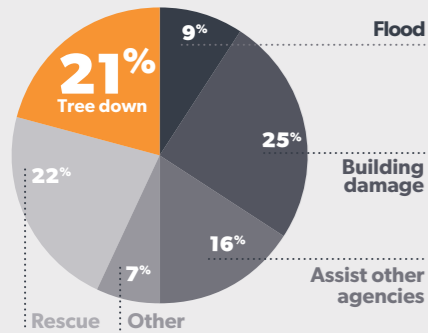


2,536

Volunteers

1,786

Requests for assistance



Aintree Unit receives heartfelt donation from CommuKnitty Crafters

By Gaisha Laida, Deputy Controller, Aintree Unit

In a touching display of community spirit, Aintree Unit has been gifted two beautifully handcrafted blankets by the talented members of Melton City Council’s CommuKnitty Crafters Group. This initiative, which began during the COVID-19 pandemic, was designed to combat isolation among seniors by providing them with a purposeful activity.

The CommuKnitty Crafters have made a significant impact since their inception, crafting over 300 blankets for cancer patients at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, 475 teddies for the Australian Red Cross, and numerous items for Knit One Give One (KOGO). These contributions have supported various charities assisting women and children fleeing domestic violence, as well as Indigenous families in need.

Upon learning about the opening of a new VICSES unit in their locality, the

crafters eagerly offered to create two blankets to provide warmth and comfort to those VICSES supports in times of crisis. Each blanket represents over 40 hours of dedicated work, with every stitch reflecting the care and skill of its creator.

Simon (Aintree Unit volunteer) and I visited the crafters to discuss VICSES’ mission and the significance of our new unit. We expressed our admiration for the generosity and meticulous craftsmanship that went into the blankets.

“We extend our heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to the CommuKnitty Crafters and look forward to continuing our partnership with our local Council,” said Simon.

This collaboration highlights the power of community engagement and the profound impact that local initiatives can have on those in need. As a unit, we look forward to continuing to make connections and fostering strong relationships with the community we serve. ■

Campaspe Shire open days attract budding volunteers



By Rebecca McDonald, Operations Officer, Western Region

Units in Campaspe Shire have been working together to attract new volunteers ahead of the upcoming High Risk Weather Season.

Community Resilience Coordinator Layton Miller spearheaded the campaign, in collaboration with members from Echuca, Rushworth, Rochester and Kyabram units.

Layton said the group was the successful recipient of a \$4000

Campaspe Shire Council Community Grant, as well as \$2500 from our Principal Partner AAMI, to support radio advertising leading up to the open days.

“We’re grateful to AAMI and the Shire for supporting volunteers,” he said.

“They understand the importance of what we’re doing.”

The campaign featured an exciting series of open days, giving locals an opportunity to look at the inner workings of the units and meet their fabulous local VICSES volunteers.

Kyabram Unit Controller Paul Octigan said that volunteer numbers have dwindled in past years following COVID-19.

“We find that most units are the same, that’s why we’re all doing this recruitment campaign,” he said.

The units are offering volunteer positions for people of all



capabilities, whether you want to be a part of on-the-ground emergency management, or work behind the scenes in community engagement or administration.

“Every position in our unit is important, for example, over the Christmas period, in a two-to-three-week period, we had 83 calls for assistance,” Paul said.

Kyabram and Rushworth Units are also recruiting junior volunteers between ages 15 and 18 looking to learn invaluable skills and make a few friends along the way. ■

Join now

If you live in Campaspe Shire and would like to become a VICSES volunteer, now is a great time to sign up!



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Stawell Unit members reach impressive 50-year milestone



Graeme & Leigh

By Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO

Dedicated Stawell Unit members Graeme Edwards and Leigh Edwards recently celebrated their 50-year milestone at VICSES.

Graeme and Leigh both originally joined Civil Defence in 1972, which then became VICSES in 1975. Over the years, the pair have attended hundreds of jobs both locally and interstate.

“From head on smashes that had to be pulled apart by tow trucks, to modern day battery operated hydraulic tools that don’t need hoses; from radios with a 4-foot (1.2m) antenna to handheld radios or phones; from blue overalls to orange overalls. How times have

changed over the past 50 plus years of working with the Victoria State Emergency Service as volunteers,” reflects Graeme.

The pair reckon they’ve “seen it all, but the best part is to be trained in rescue and first aid and being able to work with like-minded people who want to help others in their time of need.”

It is a privilege to have such committed and widely appreciated volunteers in our service and broader community. Thank you, Graeme and Leigh, for your service. ■



Flocking to Sheepvention to promote storm resilience

By Layton Miller and Lisa McDonald, Community Resilience Coordinators, Western Region

Over 3-4 August, two very chilly Community Resilience Coordinators (CRCs) from the Western Region headed out to Sheepvention, the South West’s largest community engagement event. With assistance from Operations Manager Steve McDowell, we braved the cold to bring storm awareness and preparedness to Hamilton, once known as the wool capital of the world.



South West and thoroughly enjoyed catching up with our volunteers - those from the Hamilton Unit who worked by our side on the stall, and the many others who also visited the event or were themselves managing another of the hundreds of busy sites.

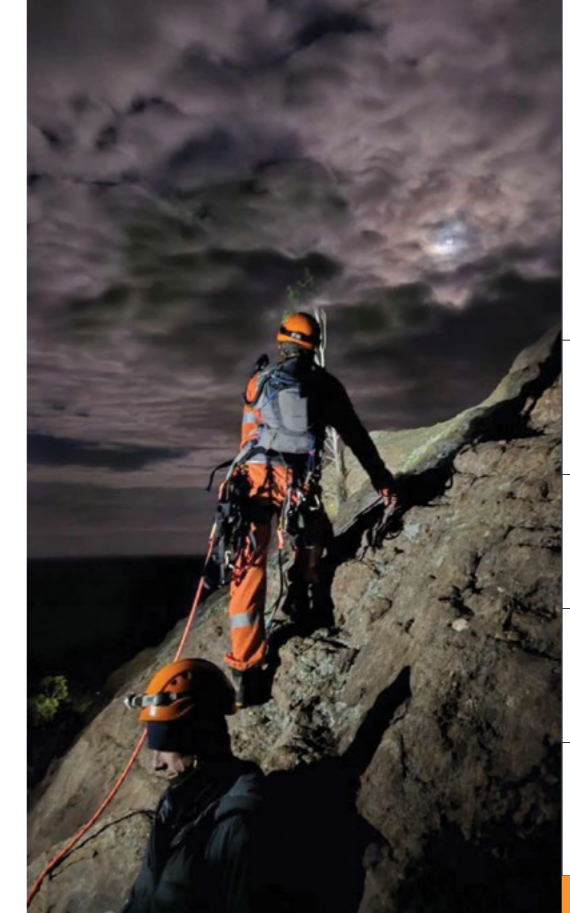
Over the course of two days, we engaged with families and farmers, agribusiness professionals, equipment manufacturers and suppliers, government representatives and school children. For us, Sheepvention was an opportunity to work together with our units to create a stronger, more resilient community that is prepared to weather any storm. We can’t wait to do it all again next year! ■

Sheepvention today is about more than just sheep, it’s about the community coming together from across the South West and further afield to gather, network, and witness the latest agricultural innovations and the finest fleeces. It’s a celebration of rural life and culture, and the ingenuity and resilience of the farming community.

With Hamilton currently sitting as the tenth most storm affected community in Victoria, we were there to build storm preparedness and raise awareness of VICSES and the work of our volunteers. For two days we extolled the importance of emergency planning, downloaded apps, handed

out flipcharts, and reignited a passion for chatterboxes. By offering a colouring station for preschoolers, we were the calm in the storm that brought respite for weary parents and brought us more opportunities to engage.

We built new connections with engagement teams across the



Multi-unit team to the rescue

By Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO

On the evening of 21 August, a multi-unit VICSES team worked alongside our colleagues at the Country Fire Authority to lead the rescue of three abseilers at Mount Arapiles.

The group was stuck on twisted ropes at 100 meters high and needed assistance to return to solid ground.

Our team employed high angle rescue support to safely recover the group with no significant injuries reported. This is a terrific example of our units and partner agencies working together to keep our fellow community members safe. Well done to the Ararat, Edenhope, Dimboola, Horsham, Nhill, and Stawell Units! ■

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WESTERN REGION

Wedderburn Unit volunteers bring unit back to community

By Ryan Malcom, Media Advisor, VHO

Wedderburn Unit volunteers are excited to begin serving their community, months after a member shortage which threatened the unit's future late last year.

A recruitment campaign which accompanied a town meeting proved a major success, with a new cohort of volunteers joining a handful of existing members in their quest to bring the unit back online.

At an official ceremony, volunteer Michael George was named VICSES Wedderburn Unit's newest Controller, months after joining the service alongside a group of local residents eager to preserve VICSES' strong presence throughout the Loddon Region.

This presence has also been strengthened by the return of

a Medium Rescue Truck to the unit last month, bolstering the unit's fleet and allowing for the efficient transport of life-saving equipment throughout the local response area.

"Our volunteers are eager to bring the VICSES Wedderburn Unit back online and have been training hard in recent months to develop vital skills and camaraderie which will assist them in responding to emergencies," said Michael.

As part of their training progression, volunteers recently completed their Crew Member Level 2 and chainsaw qualifications



and will now progress to undertake their Road Crash Rescue accreditation.

This vital training will drastically improve the ability of VICSES Wedderburn Unit members to support the Loddon community, which has been ably managed by the surrounding VICSES St Arnaud, Marong and Wycheproof Unit volunteers in recent months.

Buoyed by a cohort of fresh faces eager to give back to the community, the VICSES Wedderburn Unit has also received significant support from former Unit Controller Mike Bagnall, who has mentored new Controller Michael in the leadership role and will remain a key support to the unit going forward.

Despite the influx of volunteers, additional members are still required in a range of

roles to bolster the unit's long-term capacity.

Volunteers can assist in both operational and unit support roles and have the opportunity to learn a range of valuable skills throughout their affiliation with VICSES. ■

More information

To find out more about volunteering with VICSES, visit: www.ses.vic.gov.au/join-us.



Essendon Unit attends multi-agency land search exercise



By John Bates, Unit Controller, Essendon Unit

Land search exercises are a great opportunity to explore the local environment, understand the personal and crew preparation required for a search, and to engage with other agencies. This multi-agency involvement helps us get a better understanding of the roles that we all play when we come together operationally.

The Essendon Unit recently ran a lost person search exercise in the Avondale Heights Parklands, a part of the Maribyrnong River Valley. The terrain is a mix of tracks, waterways, flat and matted grassland, swamp and scrub,

with some reasonably hilly areas. We were joined in the exercise by the Fawkner Unit, Victoria Police and Australian Search and Rescue K9 (ASAR-K9).

In preparation for the exercise, we participated in information and awareness sessions with

Victoria Police, exploring the approaches used when they are developing and coordinating a missing persons and evidence searches. With ASAR-K9 we learnt about how the ASAR-K9 dogs work in the field.

The exercise was run on a regular training night, and was coordinated by Victoria Police, with VICSES members tasked to locate two missing persons across the target area. Two of the VICSES crews were paired with a K9 search and rescue dog to work together to cover their allocated search areas. These dogs work off scents, and it is important that the search crews don't accidentally contaminate the search area

before the K9 team has been through the area.

VICSES crews for the exercise were mixed across both participating units, with opportunities to meet and work with members from their neighbouring units.

As always, there was much learnt by everyone on the night – including a reminder of the physical effort required to participate in a search in matted grassland and thick scrub. Members who were deployed the following day for a large evidence search coordinated by Victoria Police found the exercise had helped with their personal preparation for the search deployment. ■

Camperdown Unit shares their story using unlikely artform

By Lisa McDonald, Community Resilience Coordinator, Western region



From infographics to videos and memes, at VICSES we use a range of approaches to sharing content on social media. To our knowledge, Lego based content has always been uncharted waters – until now!

At the Camperdown Unit, Kylie Warren, Officer Community Engagement holds a lifelong passion for Lego which she shares with Deputy Controller Jared Lenahan.

Lego was a big boredom buster for Kylie and her son during the COVID-19 lockdowns where they exercised their creativity building new structures. Kylie still enjoys collecting Lego and even has a secret stash of unopened Lego for her son and friends to give as presents.

To keep up her skills, Kylie started applying her love of Lego to her role at VICSES with the encouragement of Jared, adding a distinctive flair to the Camperdown Unit social media posts.

She began with a series of builds for Wear Orange Wednesday and has continued to use Lego as a way of illustrating key emergency preparedness messaging. She finds that this medium has some unique strengths such as being able to get specific angles and scenes. It also allows her to have more fun creating an active, engaging, and often humorous environment for her unit's messaging.

With Kylie's 17 years of experience in pre-press for a local paper, including graphic design, it's no wonder she has such an aptitude for bringing this new mode of storytelling to life. We can't wait to see what what she comes up with next! ■



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**OPERATIONAL
UPDATES**

Multi-agency training approach boosts High Angle Rescue response



By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO

In June, twelve emergency service volunteers from across Victoria gained valuable experience simulating High Angle Rescue scenarios in picturesque Marysville.

The cohort, which was made up of both VICSES and Country Fire Authority (CFA) personnel from VICSES Alexandra Unit, Wandin CFA and Monbulk CFA, were put through their paces by a team of six VICSES High Angle Rescue Instructors in order to gain certification to respond to high angle emergencies.

VICSES High Angle Rescue Operators are often tasked with responding to precarious incidents in hard-to-reach, remote terrain throughout Victoria, alongside CFA and other emergency service partner agencies.

This includes working closely with specialist Victoria Police Search and Rescue Squad members and general duties police to safely locate and access patients.

The four-day training block saw VICSES and CFA volunteers gain experience working closely together through a range of challenging High Angle Rescue scenarios in both wilderness and industrial settings, while developing important teamwork and inter-agency relationships.

“VICSES enjoys working alongside CFA as a partner agency, and any opportunity we have to train and learn alongside each other will only

improve our ability to respond in the event of an emergency in the future,” said VICSES Operations Officer, Technical Rescue, Andrew Feagan.

The training sessions required volunteers to problem solve and work efficiently to safely traverse the terrain, while also navigating adverse weather conditions.

High Angle Rescue crews, particularly in regional Victoria, are

often coordinated in partnership between VICSES and CFA, and involve volunteers from both emergency services.

In the last 12 months, the combined team of VICSES Alexandra Units and Marysville alongside Yea CFA have attended 21 High Angle Rescues, while across the state VICSES volunteers have received over 135 requests for assistance with High Angle Rescue incidents. ■



Local Flood Guide Enhancement Project

By Melanie Gill, Manager Emergency Management Planning, VHO

As the control agency for flood, VICSES develops a range of resources to help community members prepare for and stay safe when faced with flooding. Local Flood Guides (LFGs), one of our key flood safety resources, have recently been refreshed.

LFGs were initially developed in response to significant flood events in 2010 and 2011, targeting communities identified to be at risk of flooding. LFGs provide key community-specific flood information as well as information on how to prepare for a flood event and stay safe. Recognising the changing needs of our communities and the need for enhanced community-specific information delivery, VICSES sought to undertake a comprehensive review of the format of LFGs. To support these efforts, funding was successfully secured through the Risk and Resilience Grant program under the National Partnership Agreement on Natural Disaster Risk Reduction.

The Local Flood Guide Enhancement Project commenced in May 2023 with the goal of modernising and optimising LFGs through the introduction of a new template, informed by extensive research and consultation. The project sought to elevate the effectiveness of LFGs with an aim to deepen local risk understanding, bolster preparedness, and facilitate more effective decision-making during flood events, ultimately strengthening the resilience of Victorian communities.

Social research conducted by Quantum Market Research played a crucial role in shaping this initiative. Their reports have provided valuable insights and recommendations, guiding the design of the enhanced LFG template.

The revised LFG template was finalised and endorsed in June 2024, marking the beginning of the transition process for guides to adopt the new template.

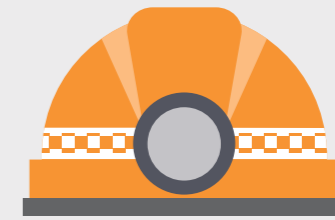
Keep an eye out for your updated LFG! ■

REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE

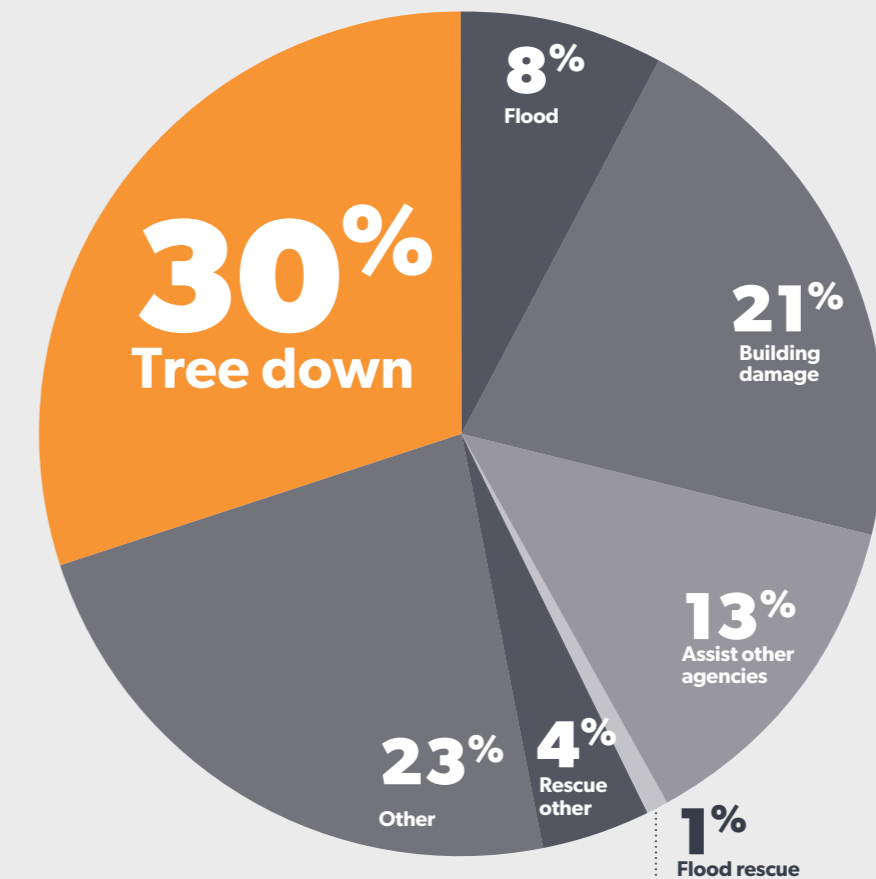
1 April – 30 June 2024

Total

4,205



Breakdown



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WELLBEING, HEALTH & SAFETY

What is fatigue?

By VICSES Wellbeing, Health and Safety teams

Fatigue is more than just feeling tired or drowsy. Fatigue is a state of mental and/or physical exhaustion which can reduce your ability to perform work safely and effectively.

It can occur because of prolonged mental or physical activity, sleep loss and/or disruption of the internal body clock. Fatigue may be caused by factors which can be work related, non-work related or a combination of both, and can accumulate over time.

We are humans not machines – our mood, energy and resilience can fluctuate depending on circumstance. This is fatigue, and it can affect our ability to relate to people and situations, it can prevent us from making good decisions, or lower our ability to assess risk and keep ourselves safe.

Fatigue can be complex and affect all aspects of the body presenting in various ways including:

- Muscular fatigue – a decrease in the maximal force or power that muscles can produce
- Mental fatigue – a gradual reduction in optimal cognitive performance
- Impaired psychomotor ability (tasks that involve both physical and cognitive performance, e.g. hearing a tree branch cracking overhead and rapidly moving to safety), and lack of energy, lethargy and exhaustion
- Emotional fatigue is emotional exhaustion and reduced ability to engage in emotional activities, such as empathising with or caring for others



What causes fatigue?

- Lack of restorative sleep (less than 7 - 8 hours).
- Extended mental or physical effort.
- Environmental stresses (light, heat, noise).
- Medications such as those causing drowsiness.
- Sleep disorders such as sleep apnoea.
- Poor dietary habits.
- Shift work, especially night shift.
- Family, social, study and sporting commitments.
- Personal problems (financial worries, relationship breakdowns).

What are the signs of fatigue?

- Short term memory problems and an inability to concentrate.
- Slower response and reaction times.
- Reduced hand-eye co-ordination.
- Impaired judgement and decision-making ability.
- Extreme tiredness or drowsiness.
- Sore, red or watering eyes, blurred vision or impaired visual perception.
- Wandering or disconnected thoughts.
- Excessive yawning or falling asleep at work.
- Noticeably reduced capacity to engage in effective interpersonal communication.
- Feeling irritable or restless.
- Micro sleeps.

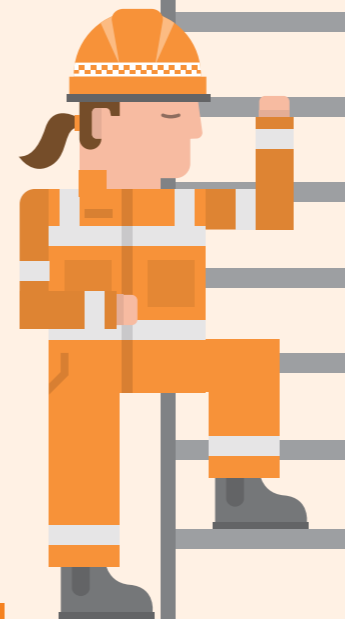
Why does fatigue management matter?

Fatigue may increase the risk of incidents because of a lack of alertness. Fatigue may result in a slower reaction to signals or situations and affect the ability to make good decisions, particularly when:

- Operating fixed or mobile plant including driving vehicles.
- Undertaking critical tasks that require a high level of concentration.
- Undertaking night or shift work when a person would ordinarily be sleeping.

Managing your fatigue keeps you safer and means we can better serve our community.

We need to be aware that our mood and energy may be impacted by fatigue which can impact our ability to perform our duties. Check in on yourself and others. Nothing is to be gained by putting ourselves at risk. We need to protect and look after ourselves so we can look after others. ■



Read more

Check the intranet for a guide to support our members to have good conversations about fatigue, to help recognise the signs and work together to identify ways to manage the effects of fatigue.

Fatigue Checklist

This checklist is a tool that can be used to start a conversation about managing your fatigue.



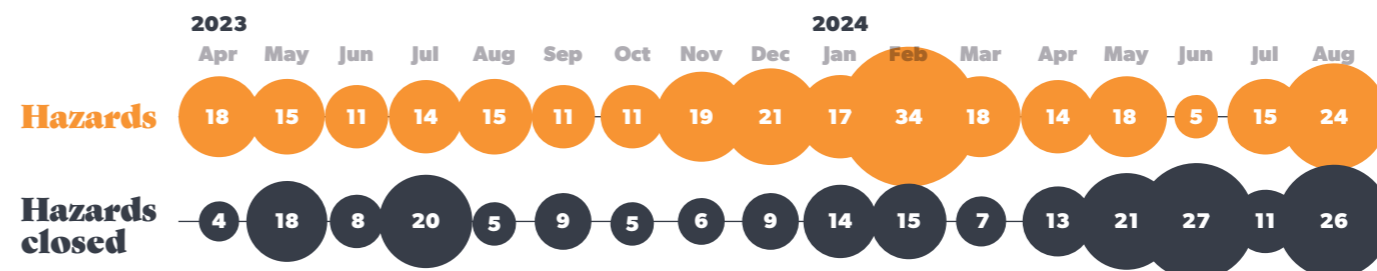
Health Watch

Understand how fatigue can impact your role by identifying key risk factors and causes of fatigue by booking a fatigue HealthWatch session. Gain useful tools and ideas on how to manage and prevent fatigue.

Scan the QR code or visit the Wellbeing team SharePoint page to book in for a HealthWatch Fatigue session for your unit!



YEAR AT A GLANCE



SAFETY DRIVES OUR DECISIONS ROADMAP



2023-2028



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334

Sep 2023 – Aug 2024

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333

Sep 2023 – Aug 2024

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Spotlight on CEFs

By Jasmine Lewkowicz, Senior Advisor Community Engagement and Programs, VHO

We asked Cobram Unit member Kate Goldsmith all about her role as a Community Engagement Facilitator (CEF) and what she learnt at the recent CEF training session.



What do you like most about being a CEF?

Being a CEF allows me to empower individuals and communities with crucial knowledge and skills to handle emergencies. I love seeing the confidence and resilience grow within the community, knowing that we are collectively better prepared for any crisis.

What learnings did you gain from doing the CEF course?

The CEF course taught me practical techniques for enhancing my communication skills and strategies for coordinating community events and engagement. This comprehensive training has empowered me to effectively mobilise and support the community, ensuring everyone is informed and connected during those stressful times.

How do you think the community benefits from having CEFs?

Communities with CEFs are better prepared to handle emergencies by reducing fear and misinformation, which leads to improved outcomes during stressful events. CEFs promote preparedness and resilience, ensuring residents are informed, empowered, and ready to support themselves and each other during crises, thereby enhancing overall community safety.

What would you say to a member who was contemplating undertaking the CEF course?

I would encourage them to take the plunge, as the CEF course equips you with invaluable skills and knowledge to make a significant impact in your community. It's a rewarding experience that not only prepares you for emergencies but also fosters a strong sense of camaraderie and purpose. ■



New multicultural resources for storm preparedness

By Jasmine Lewkowicz, Senior Advisor Community Engagement and Programs, VHO

Are you looking to engage with communities from multicultural backgrounds?

Access to translated resources is important for educating culturally and linguistically diverse audiences on topics such as emergency preparedness.

On the VICSES intranet you'll now find a suite of resources to engage with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds including storm preparedness social media tiles and flyers to download and print in a variety of languages. ■

MEET THE TEAM

Community Resilience Coordinator: Glenn Mercer

By Jasmine Lewkowicz, Senior Advisor, Community Engagement and Programs, VHO

We sat down with one of our brand-new Community Resilience Coordinators (CRC), Glenn Mercer, to find out more about him and his role supporting volunteers at VICSES!



Glenn is based in the North East Unit Support Team (UST) in the Wodonga office.

What do you see as the role of a CRC?

Providing support to our volunteers to serve their communities. The CRC role is a mix of collaboration and supporting units in community engagement campaigns, training Community Engagement Facilitators (CEFs), assisting with recruitment and retention ideas, Local Flood Guide reviews, and working with diverse stakeholders to enhance engagement programs.

What makes a good CRC?

Being a good listener to know what support is required and being able to use and develop networks and relationships to enhance community engagement. Being part of the community as a volunteer in various organisations, a background in emergency services and a diverse career helps too. Each CRC brings unique skills and experiences, allowing us to

work as an integrated team to benefit a safer community.

How does a CRC provide support to units?

Providing support, such as training of CEFs and mentoring members with messages of engagement, ensuring units are sustainable through development of unit business plans and working with communities to see the benefits of volunteering.

How does a CRC support the community?

Engaging with community to increase awareness of emergency preparedness, aiming to minimise the severity of emergencies so communities can recover quicker. The role of the CRC relies on our volunteers to help deliver this message through coordination and provision of materials and a local friendly face at community events.

What do you like most about being a CRC?

Being able to support our amazing volunteers to engage with their communities to make a safer Victoria together. ■

More information

Visit the Community Engagement Resources page on the intranet for more information.

These resources support units to understand the dangers of storms so community members can recognise when their property is under threat from severe weather, and how to take appropriate protective action.

Translated resources are available in Arabic, Karen, Khmer, Simplified Chinese and Vietnamese. The languages were chosen to reflect the languages spoken by most people throughout Victoria. ■

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MEDIA

1 April – 30 June 2024

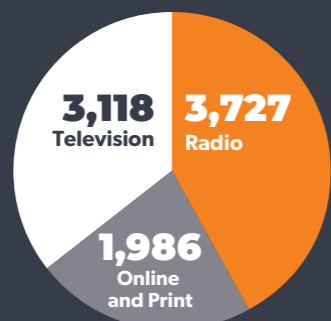
Campaigns and events:

- Wear Orange Wednesday
- National Volunteer Week
- Skye Facility Opening

Media releases:

- 7 April: VICSES volunteers provide welcome surprise at youngster's SES-themed birthday celebration
- 11 April: Volunteers at Victoria's newest VICSES unit pass major milestone
- 18 April: Females lead the way – first female VICSES members graduate into key state response roles
- 22 April: VICSES Bacchus Marsh members honoured for Eynesbury bus crash response
- 29 April: Nillumbik Unit Controller receives recognition for community commitment
- 15 May: WOW Day acknowledging volunteers
- 28 May: Volunteers receive civic congratulations for storm response
- 4 June: VICSES Corio Unit volunteer commended for life-saving rescue

Mentions of VICSES in the news:



- 6 June: Stihl supporting VICSES volunteers to kickstart Chainsaw Safety Week
- 9 June: 2024 Emergency Services Medals – Jim Kokkalos and David McKenzie
- 12 June: Holmatro lends support to Road Crash Rescue training sessions
- 18 June: VICSES San Remo Unit Controller named Bass Coast Community Leader

Social Media Support Sessions inspire creativity

By Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO

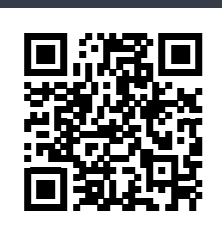
If you had to rate your confidence in using social media on a scale of 1 – 3, how would you rate yourself? Participants in our specialised Social Media Support Sessions which took place in August answered this question as the session went underway.

The training was jam-packed with information on available resources, what to post, and key technical functions. We were thrilled to have special guest unit

social media admins Nicola Karakatsanis (Essendon Unit) and Maida Phillips (Warragul Unit) join us to share their insights and wealth of knowledge with the group. We received some terrific feedback and would like to thank you to everyone who attended!

If you help manage your unit's social media accounts, there are heaps of resources available to support you, so if you're ever feeling stuck, here are some ideas of where to go to for support:

1. Social Media Support Intranet page
2. Post to the Social Media Working Group on Facebook



3. Email socialmedia@ses.vic.gov.au

Social media post highlights (state accounts):

FACEBOOK



Impressions:
1,883,413
Engagement:
130,237

01/04/24: Driver Reviver takes to the sky – April fools!

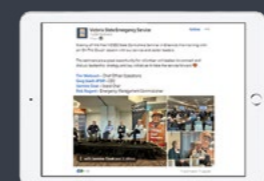
X (FORMERLY TWITTER)



Impressions: 168,261
Engagement: 4,203

19/05/24: SES volunteers reunited with survivors of June 2021 storms to help launch WOW Day.

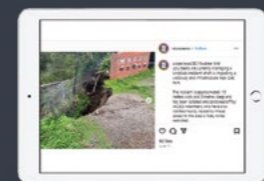
LINKEDIN



Impressions: 16,656
Engagement: 4,010

15/06/2024: Kicking off the first VICSES State Controllers' Seminar in Creswick.

INSTAGRAM



Impressions: 103,961
Engagement: 3,534

13/06/24: SES Fawkner Unit volunteers manage landslide response.

OUR PEOPLE AND CULTURE

News from VICSES People, Culture, and Development

By Keni Ramsay Samrai, Organisational Development Coordinator, VHO



Unity in Response – Embracing Diversity Program

We are thrilled to announce our newest initiative, the *Unity in Response – Embracing Diversity* program!

This four-part series is designed for unit management teams to deliver fostering inclusivity and diversity. Each session lasts 15 minutes, and you can deliver them over four evenings or in one go. The program includes

a video and a comprehensive facilitator guide, making it easy to navigate through the sessions.

If you want to train this program across several units, please contact lee-anne.carson@ses.vic.gov.au

Join us in building a more inclusive VICSES! Together we are VICSES! ■

Volunteer Leadership Development Program

The Volunteer Leadership Development Program (VLDP) is available to be held at your unit!

The VLDP is tailored for our volunteer leaders, structured around 'Leading Self, Leading Others, and Leading Teams'. This two-day program, followed by a half-day group coaching session, aims to develop flexible and emotionally intelligent leaders who can support and promote the wellbeing of your unit members.

Don't miss this opportunity to advance your leadership journey! ■

Spotlight on the VICSES Pride Network

We spoke to Senior Organisational Development Advisor, Lee-Anne Carson, to find out about the VICSES Pride Network!

What is the VICSES Pride Network, and why is it important?

The VICSES Pride Network is a vibrant and inclusive community for LGBTQIA+ members and allies within the SES. It serves as a supportive space where members can connect, share experiences, and foster a sense of belonging. The importance of the Pride Network lies in its commitment to promoting diversity, inclusion, and respect across the organization, ensuring that all members feel valued and supported.

What do VICSES Pride Network members do?

The primary goal of the VICSES Pride Network is to build a strong, supportive community for its members. We actively participate in significant events such as the Midsumma Carnival and the Midsumma Pride March, along with other Pride-related activities throughout the year. Looking ahead, we are excited to expand our involvement by organizing more local events and initiatives. We are also keen to



hear from our members about new activities and opportunities where we can make a positive impact.

How can people join the VICSES Pride Network? Who can join?

Membership in the VICSES Pride Network is open to all LGBTQIA+ individuals and allies within the SES. Whether you identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community or are a supportive ally, we warmly welcome you to join us in building an inclusive and supportive environment. Please join our Facebook page and all the events will be listed there.

Is there anything else you'd like people to know about the Network?

We are dedicated to making the VICSES Pride Network a welcoming and dynamic space for everyone. We encourage members to share new ideas and initiatives, as we continuously strive to expand our activities and create more opportunities for connection and support. Together, we can ensure that our network remains a vital source of community and encouragement for all. ■

Toolbox Talks:

Please welcome Toolbox Talks! This is a new series of one-hour professional development trainings made available on Microsoft TEAMS for all our VICSES volunteers and staff.

Toolbox Talks are designed to foster and refine one's essential skill development. Essential skills play a crucial role alongside your technical training. They include how to have a difficult conversation, relate to others, build trust, foster accountability and reflection, and resolve conflict.

To access the schedule and find out about the topics you're interested in, please refer to the Toolbox Talk VICSES intranet page.

For more information about Toolbox Talks or the VLDP, please contact:

leadershipprogram@ses.vic.gov.au or keni.ramsay-samrai@ses.vic.gov.au

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OUR AGENCY IN 2023-24

308,722

Volunteer hours

31,512

Incidents

STORM

166,320

hours

20,529

incidents



Volunteer hours attributed to storm incidents has increased by 107% compared to the last financial year.

