

SPRING 2025

Community Matters

VICSSES

EDITION 32

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MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES

Community Matters spring edition, 2025

With another spring approaching, I'm grateful for the opportunity to reflect on some of the incredible efforts of our VICSES volunteers, who dedicate their time and energy to support Victorians in need all year round.

I had a lovely time at my local annual Volunteers Week barbecue in early June, recognising the crucial work of our VICSES Nillumbik Unit and Country Fire Authority brigades. This was a great opportunity to connect with volunteers in person and congratulate the Nillumbik Unit, which celebrated its 40th anniversary on 1 June – a remarkable milestone.

In August, VICSES members from the Manningham, Nillumbik and Eastern Metropolitan Region units came together with Ambulance Victoria and Victoria Police for a large-scale training exercise in Pound Bend, Warrandyte. It was terrific to see crews in action, honing their night-time search and rescue skills. Multi-agency training exercises like this are so important

for strengthening our response across the sector, ensuring we can work as one when it matters most.

A special thank you to the VICSES volunteers who rolled up their sleeves to donate blood and plasma as part of the Emergency Services Blood Challenge from June through to August. The annual Australian Red Cross Lifeblood blood drive is vital for boosting blood supplies – especially during the winter months, when many regular blood donors are impacted by colds and flu. This makes a huge difference – VICSES alone made more than 340 donations, helping to save over 1,000 lives.

As we come into warmer weather, members across the state will be preparing intensively ahead of the higher risk weather season – ensuring our high standard of responsiveness for spring floods and storms, on top of bushfires during the summer period.

To all our VICSES volunteers – I cannot thank you enough for being there when the community needs you most, no matter what the weather.

Take care, and all the best for the season ahead.

Vicki Ward
Minister for
Emergency Services
Minister for Natural
Disaster Recovery



Welcome

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

In June I was thrilled to attend the State Controllers Seminar, a terrific opportunity for our Unit Controllers to come together and share their experiences, as well as celebrate their achievements over the past year. I enjoyed meeting so many of our volunteer leaders from across the state face-to-face. This was my first State Controllers seminar as the Chief Executive Officer, and it was a powerful representation of volunteer community service. The strength of purpose across this network is a great representation of VICSES culture and values. You can read more about the event on page 10.

With International Youth Day in August, I'd like to recognise the incredible contributions and achievements of the young people in our service. We have a crew of amazing junior members who are aged 15 – 18. Junior members receive the same level of training as our regular members, equipping them with the skills they will need to lead our service into the future. It's fantastic to see so many young people growing in confidence and developing lifesaving skills as a result of the program. The VICSES Frankston Unit is a trailblazer in the youth space with the largest junior crew consisting of 23 members and leading events encouraging engagement with local youth groups such

as Girl Guides and Scouts. We hope we can replicate this across more of our units into the future as we continue to demonstrate what a great place to learn and contribute VICSES offers. You can read more about some of our junior members and find out more about our youth-based programs on pages 8-9, 17 and 22.

Over the past few months, we've celebrated some exciting unit milestones with the VICSES Rochester Unit turning 50 and the VICSES Frankston Unit turning 60. You can read more about these celebrations on pages 14 and 18.

As we move into spring, the seasonal outlook suggests an increased chance of above median rainfall, which heightens the risk of flooding. This is in addition to extreme summer weather and consequential elevated storm and fire risk across parts of the state. As always, our people are ready to respond and support our partner agencies when requested to keep our communities safe. Thank you to everyone involved in readiness activities to prepare for the high risk weather season ahead. I hope you enjoy this edition of *Community Matters* and stay safe.

Kind regards,
Robert Purcell
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.

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Collaborative response to NSW flood aid builds long-term resilience

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO

A new initiative partnering VICSES volunteers with their Australian Red Cross counterparts during devastating floods earlier this year has aided community members in accessing vital psychological and practical support as they begin their recovery process.



The pilot, which took place while VICSES Community Liaison Officers (CLOs) were deployed and assisting communities in flood-stricken New South Wales (NSW) in May, saw Australian Red Cross volunteers embedded with VICSES and other first responder crews for the first time to provide a holistic, proactive approach to supporting communities through the emergency.

Review of a similar VICSES deployment in 2022 to NSW's Northern Rivers, including Lismore, had identified opportunities to strengthen the way volunteers supported impacted residents, by providing additional compassionate support and advice on top of their operational response to ensure community members were heard and supported while in crisis.

Deployed to townships along the mid-north coast's Manning River, VICSES Phillip Island Unit volunteer Bri Reid was part of an initial VICSES deployment of CLOs which found several remarkably resilient communities, having experienced significant flooding in the preceding years.

Tasked with providing relief and recovery materials to affected community members,

Bri and her Australian Red Cross colleague Selina were alerted to a farm which had lost upwards of 100 head of cattle including 25 calves in the flooding emergency, and attended to provide vital practical and psychological support to the family.

At the scene, impact assessment and vital recovery information was provided through a concerted approach, with first responders assessing any damage to structures while Bri liaised with the farmer to ensure food and water could be sourced for the remaining stock.



Concurrently, Selina discussed the event with the family, outlining their likely experience over the ensuing weeks and utilising her psychological first aid proficiency to provide emotional support and direct family members to further care services.

In the nearby Hinton community, crews worked to support the operation of a ferry service between the isolated township and the town of Morpeth at least twice a day, ensuring locals could attend important medical appointments and shop for essentials when required.

In tandem with Australian Red Cross representatives, VICSES volunteers engaged in regular conversations with community members, uncovering valuable information about the township and ensuring those requiring welfare checks or who were experiencing social isolation were seen to by emergency responders.



One such family, whose home near the town's bridge was isolated from both Morpeth and Hinton as water levels rose, were quickly seen to by the VICSES and Australian Red Cross contingent, who made contact from the bridge above before taking a pharmaceutical script to be filled in Morpeth on behalf of the family.

While some locals were isolated by the flooding emergency, VICSES volunteers were struck by the way the community prepared for the event, coming together in support of each other and exemplified by the fact there were no queues to use the ferry service on offer by first responders.

In total, more than 20 VICSES CLOs were deployed to assist impacted NSW communities throughout the May 2025 event, supported by Australian Red Cross, Country Fire Authority (CFA) and Fire and Rescue NSW members throughout. ■

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AFL Emergency Services Match honours commitment of first responders

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO

VICSES volunteers from across the state recently took centre stage at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), as their tireless commitment and service to communities was celebrated as part of the annual AFL Emergency Services Match.

Embarking on a lap of honour in front of more than 50,000 football fans prior to the much-anticipated clash between Hawthorn and Carlton, VICSES volunteers joined colleagues from Ambulance Victoria, Fire Rescue Victoria, Life Saving Victoria, Victoria Police and other emergency service partners in showcasing their shared commitment to Victorians.

Volunteers paraded around the boundary on foot following a convoy of first responder resources which included a VICSES Tambo



Valley Unit support vehicle, as fans applauded in acknowledgement of the vital role emergency services play in communities throughout Victoria.

Hosted by Hawthorn Football Club, the AFL Emergency Services Match has been a fixture of each season since 2019, allowing volunteers to engage and build relationships with like-minded first responders from across Victoria while reflecting and celebrating their service.

The united approach, with all first responders walking alongside each other, showcased the commitment of Victorian first responders to 'Work As One' to support communities while bolstering inter-agency camaraderie and familiarity.

While allowing community members to put faces to their local emergency service providers and promoting conversations around emergency preparedness, the event also preceded the Transport Accident Commission's 'Band Together' round.

Placing a spotlight on the role of speeding as a contributing factor to fatal and serious injury crashes, the campaign saw local footballers and netballers across the state wear blue armbands at the weekend to reinforce the importance of safe driving practices.

The match was also a particularly apt time to acknowledge the service of volunteers across the state, after VICSES crews responded to more than 1,178 requests for assistance in the wake of damaging winds which swept across Victoria the week prior. ■



Woman-focused volunteer network strengthens inter-agency bonds

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO

Volunteers from across Victoria's Mornington Peninsula are more prepared than ever to support their fellow first responders, following a female-led networking initiative developed and implemented by VICSES Hastings Unit.

Held in late-July, the afternoon tea built on the success of last year's inaugural event, which saw female volunteers representing VICSES Frankston, Hastings, and Sorrento Units, Country Fire Authority, Volunteer Marine Rescue and Search and Rescue Dogs Australia (SARDA) join forces to strengthen inter-agency relationships.

An estimated 50 women from across the emergency management sector, state and local government, and local media, united at the most recent event to learn more about the capabilities and operational approach of local first responders, while celebrating and championing the role of female volunteers.

With a host of inaugural attendees returning, the event was bolstered by the addition of representatives from Australian Volunteer Coast Guard flotillas at Western Port and Safety Beach, as well as Mornington Surf Life Saving Club volunteers, who each shared their own unique insights into the region's volunteering landscape.

For the first time, a keynote presentation by VICSES Swan Hill Unit volunteer and Peer Support Officer Wendy Hayes prompted positive discussions around

the wealth of wellbeing supports available in the emergency services sector and initiated important knowledge sharing among attendees.

The event also served as an opportunity for VICSES volunteers to explore the potential for further collaborations, with a series of multi-agency training events with local SARDA volunteers already in the planning stages, in addition to the ongoing annual networking opportunities already established.

With VICSES Frankston, Hastings, and Sorrento Units each among the state's busiest in the last 12 months, the inter-agency relationships first forged at last year's event have proved valuable, with local volunteers having been called to provide emergency support to other agencies more than 150 times during this period.

This support has been reciprocated by our partner agencies at many of the more than 2,600 requests for assistance for VICSES volunteers located in the Mornington Peninsula area in the last year, in that same period, highlighting the 'We Work As One' approach adopted by Victoria's emergency service providers. ■

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International Youth Day: Meet the future of VICSES

By Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO

Did you know that young people aged 15 – 18 years old can join VICSES as junior members? Our junior accredited units are specially equipped to support young people on their VICSES journey.

Our largest team of juniors is located at the VICSES Frankston Unit where they have a crew of 23 young people. We spoke to some of our junior members to get to know them better and find out what it's like to be a young person at VICSES!



Storm

16 years old, junior member at the VICSES Wodonga Unit

Storm joined us in February 2025. She was inspired by her dad who is also a Wodonga Unit volunteer and she wanted to become more involved in assisting the community. Storm is loving her VICSES journey so far. "I really enjoy being involved in community engagement activities, learning new life skills and working as part of a team," she said. She is most proud of her participation in the Good Friday Appeal where she assisted in raising much needed funds for the Royal Children's Hospital.

Storm's message for budding junior members is:

"It's a rewarding opportunity to develop practical skills, build confidence and contribute to the local community."



Brook

16 years old, junior member at the VICSES Frankston Unit

When Brook saw the flyer for junior member recruitment, she was intrigued. She was drawn to the role because she wanted to learn new skills. Brook really enjoys how she gets to learn with a little theory included, and then get into the best part – applying the theory to training scenarios.

"I'm really proud of joining VICSES - it's an entirely new experience and is really worth it. Being a junior member is incredible. My unit treats us well and it's an incredible workplace. What you learn is worth the effort - personally I've learned to be confident and how to be an awesome team leader."



Daniel

18 years old, junior member at the VICSES Frankston Unit

Daniel joined at the end of December 2023 after seeing his friends join the cadet program. "A lot of the practical work is very exciting, I love experiencing all the scenarios we're given," said Daniel. Daniel is most proud of his growth in leadership throughout the two years he's been a junior member. He's learnt how to take more initiative and be confident in decision making. Daniel's advice to other young people thinking about joining up at their local VICSES unit is:

"Absolutely do it, I promise the skills you learn and the experience you get is all the more worth it".



Zeke

16 years old, junior member at the VICSES Frankston Unit

Zeke joined in late 2024 for a school program. "I enjoy the more physical aspects of the training like when we do search operations or packing and jacking," said Zeke. Through the program, Zeke has made improvements in communication and teamwork. Zeke encourages other young people interested in becoming a junior member to join up.

"Being a VICSES junior member can help in everyday life and be useful for future opportunities. As a junior member at VICSES I have learnt about how to fix windows or light up areas if needed. I have learnt stuff that could help in the future."



Emily

15 years old, junior member at the VICSES Kilmore Unit

Emily joined VICSES in May 2025. She was inspired by her mum who is a seasoned emergency services volunteer, having been at the Country Fire Authority and now VICSES. Emily's favourite thing about being a volunteer is learning new things each week. Her role has enabled her to grow a unique skillset, and she is growing in confidence as a team member.

"When I look back on my journey, I'm mostly proud of how I have opened up to the team and I'm not so shy now. If anyone told me they were thinking about becoming a junior member I would tell them to do it, as it will be worth it."



Luke

17 years old, junior member at the VICSES Frankston Unit

Luke joined VICSES to expand his skillset and make a real difference in his community. He enjoys learning road rescue techniques – particularly methodically disassembling vehicles and learning how they work. Luke is proud of the confidence and skills he has gained, and how he's been able to cultivate a sense of belonging within the Frankston Unit team. When asked what he enjoys about being a junior member, he said:

"I cannot recommend it enough. It is the best thing that ever happened to me. I made connections with my team, and it also teaches you social skills."



Gracie

15 years old, junior member at the VICSES Frankston Unit

Gracie joined the Frankston Unit team this year. She wanted to join VICSES because it sounded fun and exciting, and she wants to have a job where she can help people when she's older. Gracie really enjoys small rescues and searches and is most proud of how she's stepped out of her comfort zone and met new amazing people.

"It's a really fun thing to do. You learn new things while having a lot of fun and you never know where it will take you."



Join now

Feeling inspired to join our crew as a junior member or know a young person who might be keen? Contact us to find your closest junior accredited unit. ■



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State Controllers Seminar sees VICSES members celebrated for service

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor and Lucas Evans, Work Experience Student (Community and Communications team), VHO



VICSES Unit Controllers and volunteers have gathered to share their experiences and celebrate emergency response efforts following a busy year for volunteers across the state.

Held in Preston on 28 June, VICSES’ 2025 State Controllers Seminar allowed volunteers and staff to come together to discuss key strategic focus areas and acknowledge exceptional service throughout the organisation.

Several state excellence awards were presented throughout the evening to both volunteers and staff, honouring their tireless commitment and adaptive approach to improving the way VICSES provides vital emergency response in its community.

Building on a series of regional awards presented at recent ceremonies held throughout Victoria, the event saw exceptional efforts at a state-level recognised in seven categories, in addition to one VICSES Life Membership.

VICSES Heathcote Unit volunteer Peter Duncan has refined his approach to streamlining day-to-day unit tasks and the management of requests for assistance (RFAs) over more than a decade,

implementing Trello and other systems which have been adopted across the state to improve workflow and emergency management.

The initiatives, which are now core to the local success of many units, have resulted in VICSES volunteers being more effective, organised and ready to respond, and earned Peter acknowledgement with an Excellence in Innovation award.

Similarly, VICSES Chiltern Unit volunteer Cameron Roach has proven to be a vital part of his community, training local volunteers and informing community members how best to be prepared in an emergency and ensuring members are confident, skilled and safe at all times.

Cameron was awarded the Excellence in Learning and Development honour, celebrating the valuable knowledge and skills he has imparted on communities throughout the northeast and beyond.

VICSES Hastings Unit volunteer Mark Ivory was celebrated for showcasing Excellence in Cooperation, having strengthened the relationship between his local unit and the CFA to provide faster emergency response times when needed, while also creating systems to improve data flow, task tracking, inter-agency coordination and knowledge-sharing between organisations.

VICSES People and Culture Manager Lexi Hilgert received the VICSES Values award for her constant commitment to acting with integrity, empathy and focus in support of volunteers throughout the state’s west.

As a trusted voice, Lexi’s ability to engage with volunteers and staff through cultural surveys, grievance management and recruitment

efforts has left a valuable impression on the organisation at a state level.

VICSES Yarrowonga Unit member Laura Nish was presented the Excellence in Community Engagement award, recognising the transformational impact she has had on emergency preparedness locally, where she organises 15 events each year and coordinates her unit’s Facebook page, regularly sharing proactive preparedness messaging.

Peer Support leader Gail Wood was presented the Peter Rabone Shield for Excellence in Peer Support, having travelled 447 kilometres to attend an after-action review for a highly complex, multi-agency incident, when she directed all attendees, many of whom were locals, to mental health services available.

And the 2025 Young Member Excellence award was presented to 21-year-old VICSES Nillumbik Unit volunteer Joshua Wright, celebrating his role in responding to almost 400 local RFAs while showcasing leadership and maturity in managing a range of unit-led projects.

To round out the evening, outgoing VICSES Chief Officer Operations Tim Wiebusch was awarded VICSES Life Membership, celebrating his consistent dedication to VICSES over more than 30 years which received a standing ovation.

Initially a volunteer with VICSES South Barwon Unit, Tim began a career with VICSES as the first ever Volunteer Support Officer in 2003, before rising through the ranks and ascending to become Chief Officer Operations in 2017 and now Victoria’s Emergency Management Commissioner.

Already receiving a National Medal, National Emergency Medal and Emergency Services Medal for his service with VICSES, the award of Life Membership celebrates Tim’s undying commitment to Victorian communities, his valuable leadership through major emergencies, and his willingness to continually empower VICSES members. ■



Sheepvention in Hamilton: VICSES on show in the Western District

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

Each year on the first week of August, Hamilton becomes the epicentre of Victoria’s sheep and wool industry for the Sheepvention Rural Expo. Sheepvention is a two-day showcase of livestock, agri-tech and country know-how held at the Hamilton Showgrounds and run by the Hamilton Pastoral and Agricultural Society. This year’s event took place from 3-4 August and again drew significant crowds, continuing a tradition which attracts around 25,000 visitors annually.

VICSES volunteers from across the region delivered a strong activation focused squarely on recruitment. Throughout both days, a steady stream of locals stopped by to learn what it’s really like to be a VICSES

volunteer – how crews train, the range of roles, and the commitment involved. Members answered questions, shared their lived experience from recent storm and flood responses, and guided interested people to take the next step with joining up to their nearest unit. It was a simple formula: genuine conversations, practical advice, and clear pathways into volunteering.

A highlight was the presence of our major corporate partner, AAMI, who joined forces with our volunteers on the stand. The AAMI team immersed themselves in the event, engaging with families, locals and students, and actively funnelling local enquiries to the VICSES members present. Their support amplified our reach

and reinforced the strength of our partnership in building safer, more resilient communities – particularly in Victoria’s south-west where the need for new volunteers remains high.

For prospective recruits, having current volunteers on hand – people who live and serve locally, made the difference. By the end of the expo, the team left Hamilton with a healthy pipeline of expressions of interest.

A big thank you to all volunteers and staff who represented VICSES over the two days, to the units that provided kit and logistics support, and to our partners at AAMI for standing shoulder-to-shoulder with us. Events like Sheepvention are only possible because of that combined effort. If you’re a VICSES member who would like to be part of the next regional activation – or want materials to support local recruitment – get in touch with the Publicity, Events and Partnerships team (mediaevents@ses.vic.gov.au) or your Regional Community Resilience Coordinator. ■



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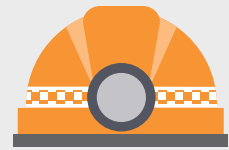
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EASTERN REGION

1 April – 30 June 2025

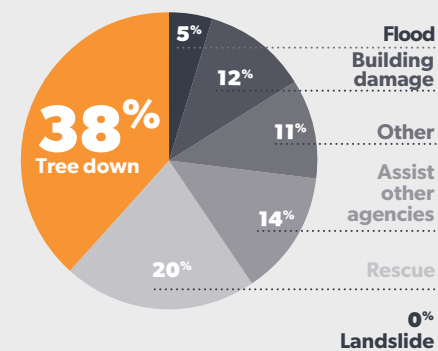


2,723

Volunteers

2,383

Requests for assistance



Eastern Metro VICSES crews enhance night- time bushland search and rescue capability

By Julia Sarroff, community engagement
volunteer, VICSES Manningham Unit



The VICSES Manningham Unit recently undertook a multi-agency land-based and water-based search and rescue (SAR) training exercise in Pound Bend, Warrandyte.

Ambulance Victoria (AV), Victoria Police, as well as the VICSES Nillumbik and Eastern Metro Regional units formed part of the joint mock rescue scenario, which was based on previous searches undertaken by Victoria Police and VICSES volunteers.

The Manningham and Nillumbik units are responsible for some of Melbourne's most diverse terrain. Manningham includes undulating suburban areas, dense bushland and the Yarra River. This annual simulated SAR provided a valuable opportunity to strengthen our skills in navigation and casualty handling, in challenging night-time riverside conditions. We also worked on refining how we would collaborate with other first responders in a real-life rescue.

Following a briefing by the Victoria Police Search and Rescue Commander on the missing person scenario, the crew coordinated almost 50 Manningham and Nillumbik VICSES volunteers to set out in separate teams to search two areas on foot with a qualified inflatable rescue boat (IRB) crew searching the water and along the riverbank.

Once the mock casualty was located, a team of AV paramedics joined VICSES volunteers and provided medical assistance. First responders worked closely together to secure the casualty for transport in the VICSES Mule. They then wheeled the stretcher up from the riverbank through treacherous bushland scrubs, and several kilometers up steep terrain to a waiting paramedic vehicle large enough to transport the patient on the stretcher.

VICSES and AV noted after the completion of the training exercise how useful detailed interactions were to ensuring the safe extraction of the casualty. All agencies took away key learnings which will aid more efficient future SAR. ■

Interpreters trained to support CALD communities in emergencies

By Liz Frazer, Acting Senior Advisor Community Programs
and Engagement, VHO



Local interpreters in Shepparton are now better equipped to support their communities during emergencies, thanks to a specialised training session delivered through a collaborative effort between VICSES, local volunteers, and the Monash Intercultural Lab.



The Natural Disaster and Emergency Warnings Training for Interpreters Program was recently held in Shepparton, led by Monash University's Translator and Interpreter Training Program. I supported the session alongside VICSES Hume Regional Unit members Sue Sheldrick and Prajit Kotia, and Acting Community Resilience Coordinator Sara-Jane Bowering.

The training helped interpreters enhance their skills in understanding, interpreting, and translating critical emergency information. Key areas of focus included interpreting flood warnings from the Bureau of Meteorology and VicEmergency

and developing culturally sensitive methods for communicating warning messages to non-English speaking communities.

Participants practiced translating emergency warnings into different languages, ensuring that more people - regardless of language background - can access information and stay safe in an emergency.

This initiative marks a significant step forward in helping CALD communities in Shepparton to understand and respond to emergencies with confidence. ■



Photos courtesy of Wellington Shire Council

Wellington Shire steps up safety with 16 new emergency markers

By Rachael Nicolson, Operations Officer Emergency Management, Eastern Region

16 new emergency markers were installed across Wellington Shire in June to enhance emergency response in remote and high-risk locations.

Led by the Wellington Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee, a multiagency working group - including Ambulance Victoria, Country Fire

Authority, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Hancock Victorian Plantations, Parks Victoria, Southern Rural Water, Victoria Police, VICSES, and Wellington Shire Council - identified key sites. VICSES units from Maffra and Yarram contributed valuable local knowledge and incident data to guide the selection process.

Funded by Emergency Recovery Victoria, the project targeted areas with challenging access, a history of emergency incidents, and high visitor numbers. Each marker provides responders with critical

information such as terrain type, access routes, and equipment requirements, helping dispatchers communicate crucial needs for effective response.

A media event at Blores Hill Mountain Bike Track near Maffra celebrated the successful installation in July 2025. Strategically placed across the Wellington council area, the markers support both residents and tourists in times of need.

Building on this success, additional funding has been secured to expand the initiative with more emergency marker installations. ■

More information

Marker locations can be viewed at emergencymarkers.com.au.



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Lights, sirens, action: VICSES Frankston Unit’s 60th anniversary dinner dazzles

By Brooke Bird, Community Resilience
Coordinator, Eastern Region

The VICSES Frankston Unit marked a major milestone on Saturday 19 July, celebrating 60 years of dedicated service to the community with a commemorative dinner and awards night. The evening served as a powerful reminder of the unit’s beginnings in 1965 as a small group of Civil Defence volunteers, and how it has grown into a skilled, dependable emergency service.

Frankston RSL provided the backdrop for a memorable evening, as members past and present joined dignitaries and supporters to reflect on six decades of service and achievement. The event was attended by several special guests including:

- Tim Wiebusch, Emergency Management Commissioner
- Rob Purcell, VICSES Chief Executive Officer
- Alistair Drayton, VICSES Acting Chief Operations Officer
- The Hon. Sonya Kilkeny MP, Attorney-General

- Paul Edbrooke MP, Member for Frankston
- Kris Bolam, Mayor of Frankston City

The night not only celebrated the unit’s 60-year legacy but also recognised the exceptional service and dedication of its members. Unit member Mick Pocock-Davies delivered a moving presentation on the 60-year history of the Frankston Unit, capturing key moments and milestones with insight and care.

A highlight of the evening was the presentation of service

awards, recognising outstanding commitment to VICSES and the community.

Unit member Leah Double received the impressive 15-year National Medal.

Unit Life Memberships were also awarded to Warwick Grassick, Tanya Lindupp, and Shane Double.

I closed the speeches with a heartfelt tribute to all who have served:

“Tonight is not just about marking the passage of time. It’s about the people – the generations of volunteers who have given their time, energy, and heart. Many of you here tonight have worn orange with pride over the decades, and I want to thank each and every one of you. Whether you served five years ago or fifty, your contribution built the foundation we stand on today”.

As the evening drew to a close, it was clear that the strength of Frankston Unit lies in its people – past and present.



Celebrating 60 years is not just about looking back – it’s about recognising the sustained efforts of volunteers who continue to show up, train hard, and support one another. The legacy of the unit is built on these actions, and it will continue to be shaped by those who choose to serve not only at Frankston Unit but also more broadly at VICSES. ■

VICSES Yackandandah Unit crew prepare their community

By Glenn Mercer, Community Resilience
Coordinator, Eastern Region

The VICSES Yackandandah Unit have been helping fellow community members to be better prepared for emergencies. The crew has attended a range of events from a pre-school visit to a community exercise with Indigo Council, focused on helping the community manage their own welfare requirements.



Indigo Shire Council teamed with Jamie MacKenzie from Red Flag Solutions to conduct a community exercise to assist community members to be informed, as well as manage their welfare needs. Input from the local response agencies on their capabilities for the event made it clear that there is a need for our locals to step in and assist in dealing with visitors if they are in a position to do so.

The community exercise scenario was a storm event where local emergency responders were stretched due to limited access and availability. The community received a text message with information regarding warnings and advice, with the local hall being the community’s key point of activity. Community members attended the hall to open the facility along with a number of

role-players from visitors to the area, to local VICSES and Country Fire Authority members providing information to the community at the hall. VICSES provided information and advice to the community to assist in the scenario.

After a quick skills audit with the group, it became apparent that community members needed to use their skills to deal with the situation and assist emergency services. To assist response agencies, community members looked after the visitors and held the fort until additional help arrived. Several learnings were developed and this training exercise is set to become a regular event.



Yackandandah Unit members also recently attended their local kindergarten to promote safety during emergencies along with what VICSES do. Activities included filling sandbags, a home emergency kit game and checking out the VICSES truck, along with a visit from Paddy!

It is terrific to see the Yackandandah Unit getting out and about, honing their skills and engaging with their local community. ■



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VICSES Life Membership bestowed on Benalla Unit stalwart

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO

Unwavering service and more than two decades of outstanding leadership have seen VICSES Benalla Unit volunteer Colin Croxford ESM added to an exclusive list alongside some of Victoria’s most dedicated volunteers.



Honoured during an intimate ceremony at VICSES Benalla Unit’s Samaria Road headquarters, Colin was officially awarded VICSES Life Membership acknowledging his almost 50 years of remarkable volunteer service to north east communities, more than 20 of which were spent as VICSES Benalla Unit Controller.

Since joining the expanding VICSES Benalla Unit while in his late teens at the suggestion of his brother-in-law, Colin has been a pillar of the unit, serving as either a Unit Controller or Deputy Controller for more than 31 years between 1987 and 2018.

Leading by example throughout his tenure with VICSES, Colin grew to be well-regarded across the emergency services sector for the exceptional commitment and reliability he provided and instilled in his volunteers, attending countless callouts for storms, floods and other emergencies.

A willing first responder as devastating flooding struck the north east in 1993, Colin’s steadiness and calm leadership played a vital role in keeping communities safe throughout, as it has during a multitude of major road accidents along the nearby Hume Freeway and surrounding rural roads in recent decades.

His passion for serving his community has also extended outside of Benalla, with Colin a regular fixture on both intra and inter-state deployments to assist communities in need throughout his VICSES career.

As one of VICSES’ 20 longest-tenured current volunteers, Colin has played an important role in shaping the next generation of VICSES volunteers and leaders, showing a notable enthusiasm for engaging and imparting his experiences on those who follow in his footsteps.

His passion for training has also never failed to waver, as he still attends sessions each Wednesday night to build and share knowledge with his fellow volunteers to ensure his beloved unit is always well-prepared to support its community.

The addition of VICSES Life Membership to an impressive list of service awards which already includes an Emergency Services Medal (ESM), a National Medal (3rd Clasp), a VICSES CEO’s Award and countless long-service honours highlights the incredible contributions Colin has made to VICSES and the valuable legacy he continues to forge in Benalla and surrounding communities. ■

Future ready: Youth groups experience VICSES in action

By Brooke Bird, Community Resilience Coordinator, Eastern Region

On Monday 21 July, the VICSES Moorabbin Unit hosted its annual open night for Scouts, Girl Guides, and other youth groups. The event welcomed between 120 to 150 enthusiastic participants from eight troupes, who engaged with a series of interactive displays showcasing the unit’s capabilities.

Display stations with an array of equipment and materials to showcase who we are and what we do included:

- VICSES trucks
- Water pumps and lighting setups
- Small hand tools and chainsaws
- The Mule and casualty handling equipment
- An emergency kit and floodwater activity
- Information about VICSES resources and key safety messages

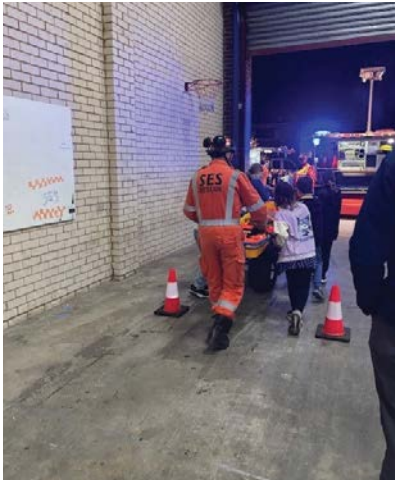
Youth groups began arriving from 7:00pm in staggered waves, with the event concluding at 8:30pm. Each group received a question sheet and was directed to their starting station. Unit subject matter experts led the



demonstrations, guided the participants through activities, and supported them in completing the questionnaire, while consistently reinforcing the vital message: Call VICSES on 132 500 for flood and storm emergencies.

The success of the night is a testament to the dedication and professionalism of the Moorabbin Unit members. Special shout out to Clarine Wheeler (Section Leader - Community Engagement), who organised the event and played an important role in engaging and inspiring the next generation.

Events like this not only strengthen community connections but also build awareness and spark future interest in volunteering. The unit remains committed to investing in youth engagement as part of its long-term vision for a safer, more resilient community. ■



VICSES Wangaratta Unit works with CFA to bolster road crash rescue capability

By Glenn Mercer, Community Resilience Coordinator, Eastern Region

The VICSES Wangaratta Unit have been on a mission to help make local Country Fire Authority (CFA) brigades more aware of how they can assist during road crash rescue (RCR) incidents. To get the ball rolling, Wangaratta Unit volunteers facilitated a discussion with local CFA brigades about processes within VICSES when responding to RCR events. The unit also presented practical demonstrations during a recent multi-agency training evening.

“Our amazing volunteers were joined by our peers from local CFA brigades to share, collaborate and network on RCR skills. We often work together and responded to two serious incidents recently in the last 24 hours. These training sessions and discussions strengthen our ability to respond and help in emergency situations,” said Unit Controller Jess Zuber.

Local CFA brigades were extremely appreciative of the networking and collaboration on the night and are further enhancing their RCR abilities by learning how they can assist both prior to, and on arrival of VICSES crews. CFA member Sean Canning from Milawa indicated that this has increased his knowledge, and that if fellow VICSES members have further information, we can pass this onto FireCom prior to VICSES arrival to assist them with their planning and indicate how we can assist each other.

This training event was an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the capability of both VICSES and CFA, and how we work in collaborative ways to help our communities. We hope we can continue to meet regularly as required. ■



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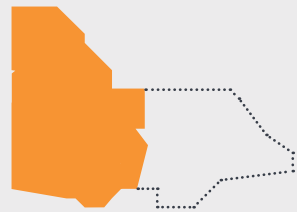
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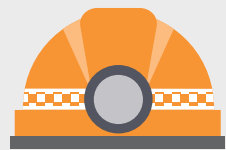
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WESTERN REGION

1 April – 30 June 2025

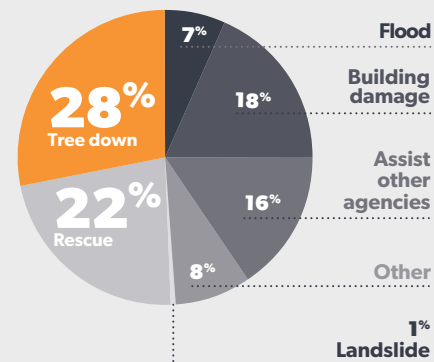


2,510

Volunteers

2,001

Requests for assistance



VICSES Rochester Unit marks 50 years of dedicated service

By Dharni Giri, Senior Media Advisor, VHO

The VICSES Rochester Unit has marked 50 years of continuous service to its local community, a remarkable milestone built on decades of dedicated volunteerism and resilience.

The unit was first established in 1974 by a group of local volunteers who saw a need for a formal emergency response capability in Rochester. With minimal equipment, members often had to construct their own tools and raise funds to acquire the basic resources required to protect their town.

Since then, a total of 174 members have volunteered with the VICSES Rochester Unit, with 18 active members continuing the proud legacy today. Over the past 15 years, the unit has received more than 485 tree-down incidents, 143 road crash rescues, and numerous other emergencies including building damage, searches, animal rescues, assist agency callouts, and major flood responses in 1974, 1975, 1983, 1992, 1993, 2010, 2011, 2022 and again in 2024.

To celebrate the half-century milestone, the unit held a gala event on Saturday 2 August to honour the contributions of past and present members. A special presentation was made to thank the Major family including, Ken, June, Glenn, and Reg Ellis, for their 50 years of continuous service. The family has been instrumental in the development and leadership of the unit, and the new VICSES Rochester facility due for completion in late 2026, will feature the 'Major Operations Room' in their honour.

The 2022 Victorian floods marked one of the most challenging times in the unit's history with the entire township inundated, including the unit's own headquarters. During this event, VICSES Rochester Unit volunteers received and responded to over 350 requests for assistance, including more than 200 floodwater rescues.

Despite their own homes being affected, members led evacuations, coordinated rescues, prepared thousands of sandbags, and relocated operations to higher ground to maintain response capability throughout the crisis.

The efforts of the unit during this time reflected the strength and dedication of the Rochester volunteers, and of VICSES personnel from across the state who deployed to assist the community during this unprecedented emergency.

Earlier this year, land was secured on Moore Street for a new fit-for-purpose VICSES Rochester Unit facility. Construction is scheduled to commence in late 2025, with the upgraded space to better support emergency response and volunteer operations into the future.

The unit has also played an ongoing role in community engagement, being among the first to implement Driver Reviver in Victoria, a program they continue to deliver today in partnership with the Rochester Lions Club.

As the unit looks back on five decades of service, they are also calling on new volunteers to join their ranks. With more frequent and severe weather events, and continued growth in emergency requests, VICSES Rochester welcomes community-minded individuals to step forward and contribute to the safety of their region. ■



Join now

Feeling inspired to grow a diverse skillset as a VICSES volunteer? Apply to join us today:



Introduction: Greg Swindells

I am thrilled to have joined VICSES as the new Deputy Chief Officer Service Delivery for the Western Region.

I began my career in emergency management working on the front line in operational policing with New South Wales (NSW) Police, where I worked for 19 years.

My journey with the SES began when I first joined NSW SES as a volunteer at my local unit in far northern NSW, before taking on a temporary role as a staff member for the Northern Zone. This opportunity led to a full-time ongoing position as Zone Commander Metro for a number of years prior to setting up the newly formed North Eastern Zone on the Northern Rivers of NSW.

I've been involved in multiple significant flooding events in the Sydney Metro area and Northern NSW as Incident Controller. I had the opportunity to work with lots of VICSES members on deployment during these operations, and I look forward to being part of the VICSES team.



Having commenced my position with VICSES in July, I'm still familiarising myself with the organisation and taking the time to understand our priorities, work underway, and how to best support our people, particularly our members in the west. I truly admire volunteers and everything they do to support our communities, and it is my privilege to work alongside you all.

I look forward to meeting more of our members as I settle into the role and get out to our offices and units across the state. ■

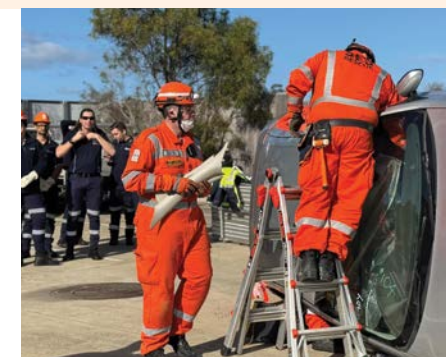
VICSES unit shares crash response skills with student paramedics

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO

VICSES volunteers from Geelong's south recently provided paramedicine students a vital insight into the reality of a road crash rescue emergencies, continuing a partnership of more than a decade with Federation University.

Hosted annually by the VICSES South Barwon Unit at its Grovedale headquarters, students joined local volunteers on 18 July to undertake mock road crash rescue scenarios, gaining valuable experience assessing and responding to a critical incident emergency in the process.

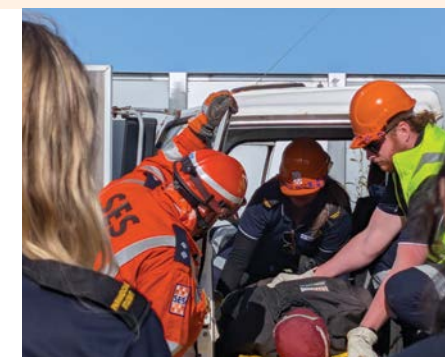
Throughout the day, students increased their knowledge on casualty extrication in the event of a road accident and gained familiarity with the techniques and tools used by VICSES first responders to aid in a patient-focused rescue.



A live road crash rescue demonstration carried out by VICSES volunteers also showcased the precision and efficiency members use to gain access to patients trapped in vehicles, and allowed students to further understand the unique skills VICSES volunteers can bring to a multi-agency emergency.

VICSES is the state's largest primary provider of road crash rescue capability, with volunteers highly trained in using tools such as the hydraulic cutters and spreaders to safely extricate and rescue patients involved in road trauma.

Crews often work closely with Ambulance Victoria paramedics, Victoria Police and other emergency service partners to respond to road crash rescue incidents, working as one to ensure the scene is isolated and patients receive prompt and appropriate care.



First hosting Federation University students in the early 2010s, the South Barwon Unit has forged a valuable partnership with the paramedicine faculty, with hundreds of students having now taken part in practical learning sessions with local volunteers to build their knowledge-base and confidence while working with other first responders. The South Barwon Unit consists of members who have competed at Australasian and international road crash rescue competitions and is one of the busiest road crash rescue units in the state.

This year's event followed a remarkably busy 2024-25, which saw VICSES volunteers across Victoria called to more than 2,500 road crash rescue-related incidents, marking the service's busiest year on record for road trauma-related callouts. ■

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Double the action: VICSES volunteers complete inland marine search and rescue exercises at Lake Eppalock and Rocklands

By Justin Navas, Acting Operations Manager Learning and Development, Western Region

VICSES volunteers from across the Western Region recently demonstrated their exceptional capabilities by completing two significant inland marine search and rescue exercises. These immersive training weekends, held at Rocklands Reservoir from 31 May – 1 June 2025, and Lake Eppalock from 21 – 22 June 2025, provided invaluable hands-on experience in a simulated emergency environment, fostering crucial skills and strengthening inter-agency cooperation.

Both exercises, aptly named Lake Eppalock 1.0 and Rocklands 1.0, successfully achieved their core mission: to enhance the capabilities of selected VICSES members who have achieved their Crew Person qualification and are working towards becoming qualified Coxswains. 60 dedicated volunteers participated, showcasing their commitment and professionalism.

The training developed essential skills in search techniques, navigation, communication, and casualty management within an inland marine setting. A key outcome was the strengthened inter-agency cooperation and communication between VICSES and vital partner agencies, including the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA), Marine Search and Rescue (MSAR), Police Airwing, and Water Police.

Volunteers gained practical familiarity with the operation and capabilities of various rescue vessels, communication equipment, and essential safety gear. The exercises utilised

realistic, scenario-based learning to effectively challenge participants' critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and application of learned skills in dynamic environments.

Both weekends featured two distinct and engaging simulated emergency scenarios, which participants navigated with impressive skill.



Exercise 1: Missing Sky Divers

In this scenario, the Rescue Coordination Centre in Williamstown reported two sky divers who had failed to land near the exercise location.

VICSES and MSAR crews efficiently conducted near-shoreline searches, demonstrating their ability to consider both water and land possibilities. Water Police provided vital information regarding potential survivability based on environmental conditions, which crews effectively integrated into their search strategies. The activation of a training beacon provided crucial practice for ground crews and aerial assets from the Police Airwing and AMSA in direction-finding. 'Found' sky divers were successfully rescued and provided with simulated first aid for injuries such as hypothermia or those sustained from a hard landing.



Exercise 2: Two Missing Kayakers

This scenario involved a report of a family of two missing from their campsite near the water.

Crews expertly searched both the reservoir and the surrounding shoreline, adapting to the possibility of capsized kayaks or individuals lost on land. The activation of an AMSA-provided training beacon by the 'missing' family members offered valuable practice with a different type of emergency signal. Water Police's survivability briefings were key in informing search urgency and methods. Boat crews executed effective on-water search patterns, complemented by thorough shoreline searches. Rescuers successfully provided first aid for simulated injuries. Aerial support from the Police Airwing and AMSA, guided by the beacon signal and communicating seamlessly with ground and water teams via VICSES radios, proved highly effective. At the Rocklands exercise, the MSAR BULLEX fire simulator was also utilised to imitate smoke from a fire, adding an additional layer of realism and complexity that crews managed effectively.

Beyond the practical skills, both exercises successfully reinforced crucial concepts of command, control, and sectorisation, proving their effectiveness for real-world emergency response. Participants gained a deeper understanding of survivability factors in marine environments. Communication proficiency was a central focus, with hands-on practice using VICSES radios from various platforms ensuring seamless information exchange throughout the simulated operations.

The success of these comprehensive exercises was a direct result of meticulous planning and coordination. Under my guidance, key representatives from all involved agencies collaborated effectively during dedicated reconnaissance and

planning days. This collaborative effort ensured that detailed Situation, Mission, Execution, Administration, Communication and Safety/Signal (SMEACS) briefings provided to participants were thorough, and that everyone was well-prepared for their roles.

VICSES provided essential resources, including a Forward Communication Vehicle, exercise support staff, an exercise controller, and a safety officer. Water Police contributed marine coordinators and vessel crews to guide search patterns, further enhancing the training environment. All participating agencies commendably managed their own travel and accommodation, demonstrating their commitment. ■



VICSES staff members team up to support those experiencing homelessness

By Jason Tonacia, Equipment Officer, State Logistics Centre

On behalf of VICSES, the Assets team recently donated sleeping bags, sleeping bag liners and camping chairs to charities supporting people experiencing homelessness including Doxa and Sacred Heart.

This was a part of the decommissioning of the staging area caches from Mulgrave, Bairnsdale, Ballarat, Geelong and Benalla as these items were past their 10 year lifespan and were completely new or unused, so we sought to donate them to a worthy cause to support those in need rather than sending them to auction or throwing them away.

It was fantastic to be able to give much needed supplies to those in need. ■

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Getting to
know Darcy

By Lauren Castle, Corporate
Communications Advisor, VHO

17-year-old Darcy is a junior member at the VICSES Gisborne Unit. I asked Darcy some questions to get to know her better and find out about her VICSES journey.



Hi Darcy! What inspired you to join VICSES as a junior member?

I learnt about VICSES from visits when I was a scout with my local scout troop, during COVID-19 when you could go out and stuff. The unit I'd end up joining came down and showed all the equipment and explained what they did.

The story of how I actually ended up joining is a funny one when you think about it, at least to me. A person who I consider very dear to me who also volunteers with VICSES, had been saying they would send me the sign-up link for VICSES on my 15th birthday, because I had been suggesting I may join for a bit. So, I woke up on the morning of my 15th birthday to a message from them with the message "Happy 15th, now sign up", with the VICSES link to apply. I also wanted to join to do something to help my community. I always feel like if you can help out, help out when you can. Even if it's minuscule. The need for people to help is always great no matter what.

What is it like being a junior member as the VICSES Gisborne Unit?

I participate in all the training that the other members do. I'm Crew Member 1 (CM1) progressing to Crew Member 2 (CM2), so I participate in basically everything, whether it be road crash rescue (RCR) training, safe work at heights (SWAHS) training, storm training – you name it, I've done it. I'm the only junior at my unit at this stage in time, so they can't really run a separate training program for me. For jobs the limits are quite strict due to what type of jobs we turn out to. As a junior I participate mainly in community engagement jobs that our unit does, and I'm a crucial part of the majority of those (not to toot my own horn). I also turn out to storm jobs under approval

from my Unit Controller – so branches, literal trees down, furniture ending up in your neighbour's pool.

You recently presented at the Emergency Management Conference – can you tell us about your experience?

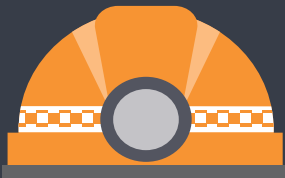
I attended the Emergency Management Conference (EMC) as a speaker for the Youth Affairs Council (YAC). I was part of a small group of three young people all from emergency services organisations. At the conference we hosted a workshop that addressed the topic "Where can our young people take us," and as a broader topic, "What barriers do youth face in emergency management". In this workshop we brought up points related to young people in emergency services such as access to training and leadership positions, and being recognised for our abilities.

At your unit, you're known for being a fierce advocate for youth, Deaf and disabled people in emergency services. From your work, and your lived experience as our youngest Deaf volunteer at VICSES, how do you practice your advocacy and what can others do to support your work in this space?

Honestly there isn't really something specific that I do to practice my advocacy, I just speak louder and louder until someone hears what I have to say, and by then it's loud enough that several have heard it. I think if people had to support what I do in the space or anyone in the space, it's simply just a matter of: stop and listen. Stopping and listening to what someone has to say is always one of the most powerful things you can do, no matter where you may be or what leadership position you hold, even if you're just a CM1. ■



Castlemaine



Volunteers on
the tools amidst
stormy winter



Sunbury



Castlemaine



Daylesford

By Lauren Castle, Corporate
Communications Advisor, VHO

We've had some big storm events this winter with strong winds and heavy rain causing damage right across the state. From 25-28 July, we saw a spike in requests for assistance with 432 received in the Western Region alone. Units hit hardest included the VICSES Ballarat Unit (59 RFAs), VICSES Gisborne Unit (57 RFAs), VICSES Woodend Unit (46 RFAs) and the VICSES Castlemaine Unit (34 RFAs). Volunteers worked night and day to clear fallen trees which were blocking roads and driveways, and respond to building damage. Thank you to all volunteers who gave their time to support their communities during this wild weather! ■



Castlemaine



Ballarat



Castlemaine



Sunbury



Sunbury

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OPERATIONAL UPDATES

R2L program supports leadership capability for our women leaders



By David Baker, Deputy Chief Officer
Capability and Jessie Schleibs-Hazelager,
Operations Business Coordinator, VHO

Our close partnership with Life Saving
Victoria (LSV) continues with another
20 VICSES volunteer women leaders
across the state participating in this year's LSV
Ready to Lead (R2L) program. 76 additional

participants got involved from Ambulance
Victoria, Country Fire Authority, Fire Rescue
Victoria, LSV, and the aquatics industry.

This is our fourth year as beneficiaries of this
program which sees our current and emerging
leaders immerse themselves in an intensive
'stretch with support' training program over
eight weeks. It involves a mix of online and face-

to-face leadership development opportunities
focusing on understanding oneself, making an
impact, leadership, and getting results.

Previous graduates have spoken highly of the
program regarding how it has developed them
for success in unit leadership roles. We look
forward to the current class of 2025 which

graduated at the LSV Headquarters on
31 May 2025, putting their newfound skills
into practice back at their units.

We are proud of our program graduates
and of Goldie Pergl (VICSES Fawkner Unit
Controller), who is a member of the R2L
program management committee. ■

Keeping community and sector guidance on storm and flood preparedness up to date

By Melanie Gill, Emergency Management and Planning Manager and Kaylene Sudholz, Senior Advisor Emergency Management
Planning Audits, VHO

VICSES is working to ensure
our sector and communities
have access to the most up-to-
date guidance on staying safe
in a storm or flood. On Monday
30 June, the State Emergency
Management Plan (SEMP)
Flood Sub-plan Edition 4.0
and the SEMP Storm Sub-plan
Edition 3.0 were published,
replacing editions 3.0 and 2.0
of these plans respectively.

We undertook a full review
of each of these plans,
including two rounds of
extensive consultation with a wide range of
stakeholders. Both plans were endorsed by
the State Emergency Management Planning
Committee (SEMP) on 29 May and approved for
publication by the State Crisis and Resilience
Council (SCRC) on 30 June 2025.

The review period for these plans was extended
in late 2024 to allow time to undertake a
second round of formal consultation with all
stakeholders due to the amount of positive
feedback in the first-round formal consultation
phase, allowing stakeholders to re-review
the significant positive changes from the first
phase. This resulted in a positive, contemporary
engagement process which has been

recognised within the emergency management
planning sector.

Complementary to the publication of the SEMP
Flood and the SEMP Storm Sub-plans, we
updated guidance material for the development
of Municipal Flood and Storm Sub-Plans within
the VICSES Emergency Management Team
and regional teams, enabling a streamlined
and consistent approach to the development
of these plans. This guidance material enables
Municipal Emergency Management Planning
Committees to prepare Flood and Storm
Sub-plans that have regard to Guidelines
for Preparing State, Regional and Municipal
Emergency Management Plans and does
not repeat information available in other
plans, intending to reduce the time and
resources required to develop these important
arrangement setting plans.

MEMP Sub-plans

This streamlined approach will
ensure more current and accessible
information for VICSES members,
and the wider emergency
management sector.



SEMP Sub-plans

These updated plans now also
include a 'design-friendly' version
which ensures a more readable
document, particular for the
general public. ■

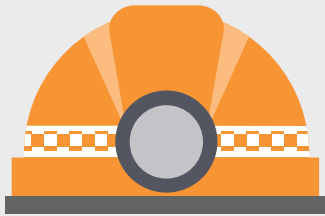


REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE

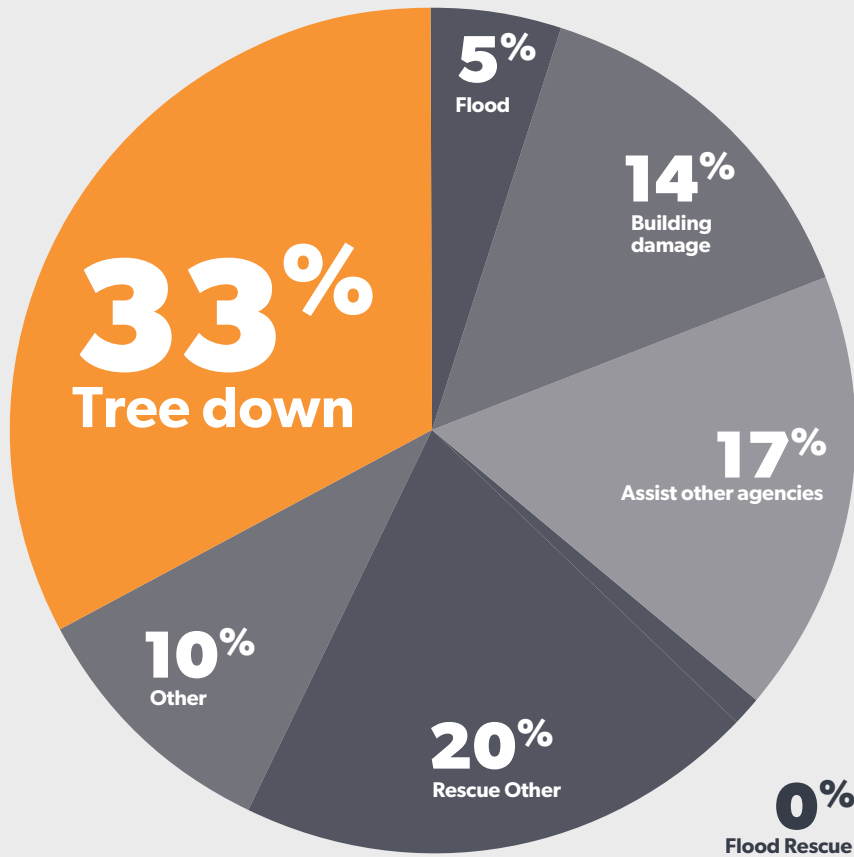
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Total

4,492



Breakdown



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WELLBEING,
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Mindfit
Podcast:
Staying Strong
– In Body and
Mind with
Emma Watt

By Belinda Rawson, Wellbeing Services Business Support Coordinator, VHO

The VICSES Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team is proud to present the Mindfit Podcast which is now available online. This inspiring series explores the many ways we can strengthen both our minds and bodies through real conversations with people who’ve lived the journey.

From health and nutrition to psychology, resilience, and post-traumatic growth, Mindfit features voices from industry leaders and individuals with powerful lived experience. Past guests have included:

- Rob Atkins, former Victoria Police officer and recovery advocate.
- Professor Dan Lubman, renowned specialist in addiction and mental health.



- Osher Günsberg, TV presenter and mental health champion.
- Dr David Cunningham, specialist sleep physician.

We’re excited to introduce our latest guest – someone many VICSES members know and admire – Emma Watt, a dedicated VICSES volunteer and staff member whose story is one of strength, commitment, and unexpected inspiration.

In addition to her vital work at VICSES, Emma is also involved in Vision Australia’s Seeing Eye Dog program, raising puppies during their first year of training. But what you might not know is that Emma is also a passionate powerlifter.

Emma began powerlifting as a way to improve her overall fitness and wellbeing – with a specific focus on increasing her bone density. Weight training is one of the most effective ways to strengthen bones and reduce the risk of osteoporosis, particularly for women. Emma’s discipline and commitment have led to impressive results, and in this episode, she opens up about her journey and the powerful impact it’s had on her life.

At VICSES, we’re lucky to have such a wealth of knowledge, passion, and lived experience within our community. One of the goals of Mindfit is to celebrate and share these stories – stories that educate, uplift, and empower.

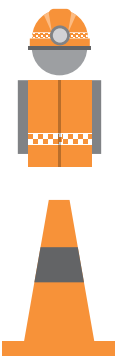
Are you a VICSES volunteer or staff member with a health and wellbeing story worth sharing? We’d love to hear from you! Reach out to the team at wellbeing@ses.vic.gov.au. ■



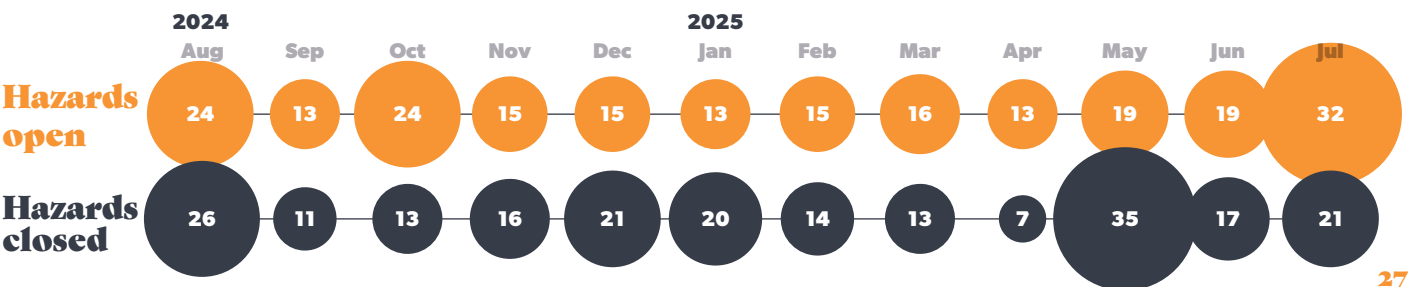
Tune in to the Mindfit Podcast and be inspired by Emma’s journey to strength – inside and out.

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SAFETY
DRIVES OUR
DECISIONS



YEAR AT A GLANCE



STEM students collaborate to foster flood safety behaviours

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO

Emergency-conscious Geelong teenagers have come together to share their insights on how best to improve floodwater awareness in Victoria, as part of a behaviour change program held in partnership with VICSES.

At an event in July, Year 9 and 10 students from the Geelong Tech School’s Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) program joined VICSES Acting Community Resilience Coordinator, Steve Cunneen, in exploring ways to limit flood-related emergencies.

Throughout the two-day program, students were tasked with tackling a pair of scenarios exploring ways to prevent vehicles entering floodwater, and alternatives to traditional sandbagging techniques.

Students were also given a tour of VICSES’ Geelong office headquarters to learn about the role VICSES and its volunteers play in their communities, the skills they possess, and the emergencies they respond to, improving hazard awareness and prompting broader discussion.

Operating in groups of five and having also engaged with local Geelong manufacturer Barrier Group, students exhibited fantastic critical thinking skills to address each scenario while drawing on their knowledge of VICSES hazards and key community safety messages throughout.

Students developed and collaborated on a range of methods to improve flood awareness in their community and promote behaviour change.

In pitching their ideas to VICSES and private industry partners later in the program, students showcased their progressive approach by highlighting:

- A mobile app which could override phone settings to alert drivers of flash flooding in

real time, before devising an alternate route to safety.

- An alternative sandbagging approach utilising mixed corn starch media, the result of extensive prototyping over a 24-hour period.
- A highly visible and easily deployable flood barrier featuring an emergency lighting system to block and divert drivers from known flood areas.

Each presentation exhibited a clear understanding of the danger flooding can pose in the community and role VICSES volunteers play in an emergency, while reinforcing the value of proactive community behaviour change initiatives. ■



Hume community resilience team supports emergency preparedness in Shepparton’s CALD communities

By Sara-Jane Bowering, Acting Community Resilience Coordinator, Eastern Region

The Greater City of Shepparton community continues to strengthen its preparedness for emergencies through targeted outreach and engagement with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

On 27 June, Community Resilience Coordinator Glenn Mercer attended a Skilled Migrant session hosted at the Indian Bar. The event was tailored specifically for recently arrived migrant professionals. The session was well received, drawing an audience of over 80 people. The session focused on building awareness around emergency preparedness, with a particular emphasis on the flood risk



faced by residents within the City of Greater Shepparton. Participants were engaged and receptive, highlighting the importance of engagement opportunities in building community resilience.

Further demonstrating our involvement in community engagement opportunities tailored to CALD communities, on 12 July the Shepparton Ethnic Council hosted a dedicated emergency preparedness session for members of the South Sudanese community. The evening provided an opportunity for open dialogue and the sharing of vital preparedness information tailored to the needs of the community.

These events form part of the ongoing efforts by the Hume Community Resilience Coordinators, and the City of Greater Shepparton to ensure all members of our communities are informed, empowered, and ready in the event of an emergency. ■



Liz recognised for her expert community engagement skills

By Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO

Congratulations to Liz Frazer who has been announced the winner of the 2025 Young Floodplain Manager Outstanding Presenter Award. Liz received this recognition for her presentation at the 2025 Floodplain Management Australian National Conference titled ‘Engaging for community action and behaviour change’, which highlighted how face-to-face conversations – not just awareness campaigns – drive real preparedness outcomes.

The presentation introduced the Preparedness Chain, a behaviour change model based on the Transtheoretical Model, used to track community readiness and guide engagement strategies.

Liz shared field data and anecdotal case studies from the Goulburn Broken catchment following the major 2022 flood event, showcasing how intentional conversations and locally tailored tools led to measurable shifts in community action.

We are so proud to have Liz working with us at VICSES where she uses her expert engagement skills working with our members and other stakeholders to increase emergency preparedness action. Well done, Liz! ■

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MEDIA

1 April – 30 June 2025

Campaigns and events:

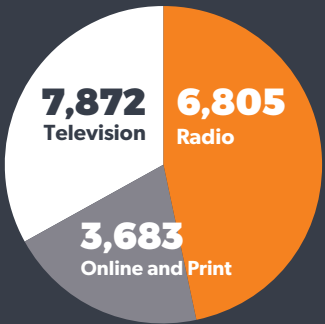
- State Controllers Seminar
- Wear Orange Wednesday
- Seymour Alternative Farming Expo

Media releases:

- 7 April - Volunteers complete major boat rescue training on Maribyrnong River
- 10 April - VICSES volunteers promote preparedness at popular Seymour expo
- 30 April - VICSES volunteers learn the ropes for High Angle Rescue response
- 2 May - Emerging VICSES leaders build connections through national program
- 5 May - VICSES Ballarat Unit's Gordon Hicks honoured with inaugural community hero award

- 6 May - VICSES shines spotlight on service of metropolitan volunteers
- 15 May - VICSES Loddon Mallee volunteers celebrated for ongoing service
- 19 May - Show your support to SES volunteers this Wear Orange Wednesday
- 30 May - VICSES volunteers build emergency resilience at Amazon forums
- 8 June - VICSES heroes honoured with Emergency Service Medals
- 10 June - Gippsland volunteers highlighted for years of VICSES commitment
- 11 June - Unique ceremony honours service of VICSES Craigieburn Unit volunteers
- 12 June - Millenium of service recognised at VICSES Hume Region event

Mentions of VICSES in the news:



- 13 June - Grampians region volunteers recognised for exemplary service
- 20 June - Service during major emergencies recognised with limited pin

Meet the team: Jo Lee, Publicity and Events Officer

Hi Jo! Can you tell us about your role at VICSES and what you enjoy about it?

I am part of the Community and Communications team at VICSES, working in publicity and events. I am involved in delivering large-scale state events, and often collaborate with media, brand and design, and community engagement team members depending on the project or event. It's rewarding to help promote the impact and dedication of our amazing volunteers and to build greater awareness of the organisation.

What is your career background prior to starting your current role?

Before joining VICSES, I worked as a Buyer for both local and international retail brands.

These roles involved trend forecasting, product development and branding, and taught me how to think on my feet and adapt quickly in fast-moving environments. These skills have come in handy when delivering large-scale events here.

What do you like to do outside of work?

You will usually find me with a book in hand, scrolling for second-hand treasures on Marketplace and Depop, or squeezing in a hot yoga class or gym session when I can.

POV: You stop at a Driver Reviver site on a road trip - what snack are you choosing?

Can't go past a packet of Tiny Teddies! They're nostalgic, delicious, and pair perfectly with a Driver Reviver cuppa. ■



Spotlight on Driver Reviver

By Ashley Pittard, National Driver Reviver Manager, VHO

As Australians prepare for a Spring and Summer period filled with exciting road trips to celebrations, holidays, sporting and community events and family gatherings, Driver Reviver is getting ready to kick into gear.

VICSES is home to Australia's largest road crash rescue network and sees the devastating impacts of road trauma firsthand. Many VICSES volunteers give their time to help out at Driver Reviver sites – and they would rather serve you a cup of coffee than cut you out of a car.

"Road crashes have claimed the lives of 787 people in Australia so far this calendar year (as of 30 June 2025) – this is a 6.2% increase compared to the same period last year. In the 12 months ending June 2025, there were 1,340 lives lost on our roads, which tragically means more than a thousand families and friends are not going to be able to share forthcoming

celebrations and holidays with a loved one," said Stephen Griffin, Driver reviver Australia Chair.

Over 150 Driver Reviver sites continue to open at a range of roadside rest stops and Visitor Information Centres throughout Australia. Community volunteers at Driver Reviver sites will provide FREE tea, coffee and snacks promoting fatigue management among motorists travelling to be safe and enjoy the holiday break.

Driver Reviver thanks the thousands of volunteers from organisations including Lions Clubs, SES, Rotary and more who help reduce the road toll and always welcome you with a cup of Bushells tea or coffee, an Arnott's biscuit and a friendly smile.



Tips from Driver Reviver:

Driver Reviver shares simple tips to help drivers STOP, REST, REVIVE, SURVIVE and enjoy safer journeys.

1. **Take breaks every two hours:** To maintain energy levels and focus, take a 15-minute break every two hours. Stop in at any of the Driver Reviver sites across the country to get some fresh air, stretch your legs, and enjoy a Bushells cuppa and Arnott's biscuit while you're at it.

2. **Stay hydrated and snack smart:** Drink plenty of water throughout your trip to stay alert as dehydration can lead to fatigue. Have healthy snacks like fruits, nuts, and granola bars readily available and try to avoid heavy, greasy food that can leave you feeling sluggish.

3. **Share the driving:** If you are travelling with others, take turns behind the wheel to help reduce fatigue and keep everyone safer on the road.

4. **Don't push through:** Enjoy your journey and avoid the temptation to 'push through' long stretches. Accidents are more likely to happen when you don't take regular breaks. Stopping in at the towns along your way for a bite to eat can also help to support the local communities!

5. **Hit the tunes or podcasts:** Prior to heading on your road trip, create a playlist of some fun, sing along tunes for the drive, or download a new

audiobook or podcast. Having your entertainment ready helps you stay focused on the road and makes the drive more enjoyable.

6. **Check the weather and traffic:** Australian weather can turn very quickly, so it's important to check the latest weather forecast and traffic conditions before you start your trip. Avoid driving in heavy rain or other unsafe weather conditions. ■

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VICSES at a glance



Who we are

Control agency for:



Flood



Storm



Earthquake



Tsunami



Landslide



154

Units

16

Permanently
staffed offices

104

Road rescue
providers

Our people in 2024-25



5,040
Volunteers*

Female 33%
Male 66%
Other 1%

Volunteer leadership (Controllers and Deputy Controllers)

Female 30% Male 70%

*active & non-active

368
Staff

Female 57%
Male 42%
Other 1%

Staff leadership (Executive, Senior Managers, and other people leaders)

Female 40% Male 60%



Our agency in 2024-25



342,374
Volunteer hours



35,940
Incidents



Flood

11,287 hours 2,165 incidents



Storm

132,569 hours 24,188 incidents



Road crash rescue

16,269 hours 2,532 incidents



Tsunami, landslide or earthquake

2,619 hours 154 incidents



Assist agency

45,430 hours 3,621 incidents



Community engagement

122,382 hours 2,121 incidents



Rescue (other/RAIR)

6,270 hours 1,007 incidents



Other

5,548 hours 152 incidents



2024-25 marks our busiest year on record for road crash rescue and assist agency response.