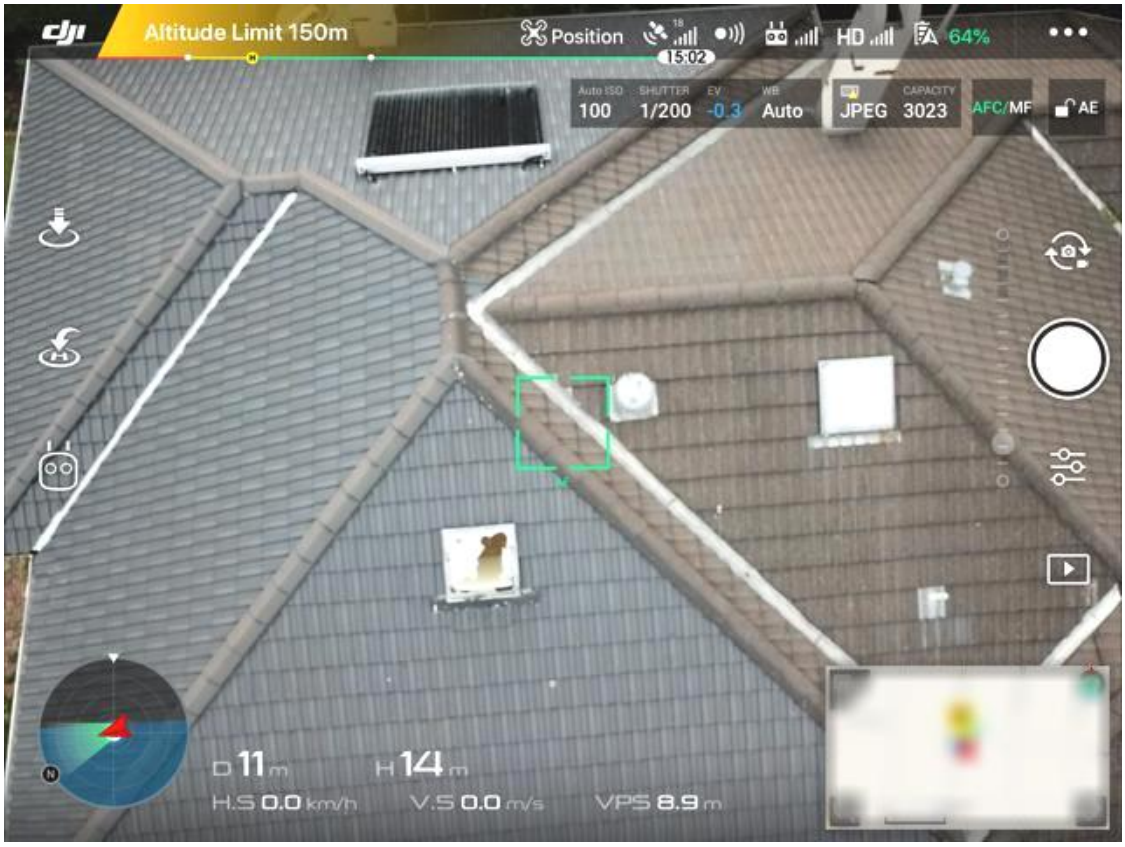
Media Release

Victoria State Emergency Service

Drone technology brings VICSES and MFB together after storms



Emergency crews from the VICSES and MFB have teamed up in storm-affected Melbourne this week, brought together by a sophisticated type of technology.

On 22 and 23 January, volunteers and fire fighters operated in challenging weather conditions, using MFB's Remote Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) technology to scour Glen Iris for building damage.

MFB uses the cutting-edge technology at a wide variety of events from bush fires to floods and police incidents, with VICSES' Duty Officer David Baker the brainchild behind getting the technology used for storm damage assessment.

Within hours of Duty Officer Baker floating the idea of surveying storm-affected homes with drones, volunteers from the VICSES Malvern Unit and 20 MFB firefighters were on the ground on Wednesday, setting up for a day of Rapid Impact Assessments (RIAs).

The technology allowed VICSES crews to stay on the ground instead of inspecting the roofs themselves, making the operation much safer and up to 90% faster.

According to Malvern Unit Controller Phil Munslow, a standard RIA set-up on a roof takes between 30 and 45 minutes - not including the time it takes to actually find building damage and assess whether it requires an emergency response. In this week's operation, drones were up and inspecting a home at each location within 3-4 minutes.

Images from the drones have since revealed damage on a numerous buildings – ranging from 100 year-old townhouses to modern apartment buildings. Home owners were told to contact tradespeople and insurance companies to lock in permanent repairs.

MFB's specially trained RPAS Pilot, Leading Firefighter David Rylance said that MFB was pleased to be able to provide this aerial intelligence to support VICSES in response to this incident.

Following the operation, Victoria State Emergency Service volunteers in Malvern have expressed their keenness to work with MFB crews in the future, where possible.

Quotes attributable to VICSES Duty Officer David Baker:

"I was with colleagues in the State Control Centre, and asked why we weren't using drones to inspect the 100+ damaged homes that still needed to be looked at in Glen Iris."

"I made some inquiries to MFB and they were happy to assist us, it's historic that we're using the technology for building inspection after storm activity."

For more information, contact:
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Quotes attributable to Malvern Unit Controller Phil Munslow:

“Rapid Impact Assessments can be done by VICSES, MFB or CFA, so we are well-versed in what to do when storms hit – this time was a bit different, though.”

“Usually, our volunteers will spend between half an hour and 45 minutes setting up a rooftop safety system and finding appropriate anchor points – using drones means we cut all that out and can safely look at the damage from above.”

“The partnership between MFB and VICSES, and all emergency services, is a critical one for our communities across Victoria.”

Quotes attributable to RPAS Pilot, Leading Firefighter (LFF) David Rylance:

“Having our RPAS on scene to provide an aerial overview increases safety for firefighters and other emergency responders as we can see what hazards and situations our crews may be exposed to in advance.”

“As a recognised leader in the field, MFB is often called upon to provide expertise and assistance to our sector partners and government on this technology.”

Malvern Unit Controller **Phil Munslow** is happy to speak to media about the collaboration between the VICSES and MFB in Glen Iris.

Also note that additional still images of the operation are available upon request.

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