

SPRING 2021

Community Matters

VICSES

EDITION 16



OUR BUSIEST WEEK ON RECORD:

**SEVERE FLOODS
AND STORMS
HIT VICTORIA**



*New VICSES
website*



*Diversity and inclusion
at VICSES*

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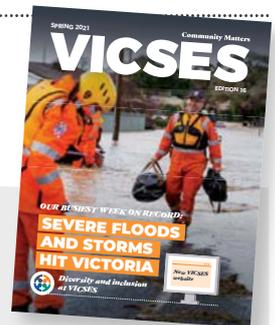
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Interested in contributing?

Submit your article here:
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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, present and emerging.

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MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES

Welcome to the third edition of *Community Matters* for 2021.

I'm delighted to formally welcome you to this special edition of *Community Matters* for 2021 as I take on the role as Victoria's Emergency Services Minister. While new to the role, I'm passionate about the hard work of Victoria's State Emergency Service volunteers – your efforts over recent months have not gone unnoticed.

Winter was extremely busy for VICSES and during a seven-day period in early June, you experienced your busiest operational period on record.

In early June, heavy rain and fierce winds swept over Victoria with the Dandenong Ranges and East Gippsland among the areas most impacted. Tragically, two people lost their lives after drowning in flood waters.

In the second week of June there were more than 6,946 callouts for trees down, 1,082 callouts for building damage, 250 for flood rescues and 98 domestic rescues, involving the rescue of persons trapped in homes and properties.

The busiest units included Lilydale and Emerald VICSES, which attended to

1,182 and 775 requests for assistance over the period.

This was no mean feat for Emerald's unit in particular, whose rescue truck was crushed by a fallen tree while on a callout during the storm. It was incredibly lucky no-one was injured, and a reminder of the risk emergency services volunteers put themselves into in order to keep the community safe.

In June, hundreds of VICSES volunteers were deployed to help impacted areas and volunteers and staff attended more requests for assistance than they did all year.

Emergencies like this show us just how important it is to support our volunteer agencies so they can keep adapting to withstand future challenges. That's why the Victorian Government this year invested more than \$125 million in infrastructure for VICSES and I look forward to seeing this investment coming to fruition as your Minister.

I'm looking forward to helping communities rebuild and prepare for future emergencies, as well as meeting our VICSES volunteers who continue to show strength and determination through challenging times – you have my heart-felt gratitude.

**The Hon. Jaclyn Symes,
Minister for Emergency Services**



Welcome

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

Firstly, I'd like to thank all of our members for your support during the severe storms and flooding in June, where we received over 10,000 requests for assistance – an incredible and challenging response period. I cannot express how grateful I am for your ongoing support and dedication to VICSES, and our communities.

VICSES was recently handed the preliminary findings from the independent review by *Beyond Frontiers* into sexual harassment and discrimination within VICSES, which inform us in understanding the scale of this important issue. It is vital that every member feels safe and supported at VICSES, and we are committed to driving the contemporary standards to ensure the wellbeing of our volunteers and staff.

VICSES has also sought advice from the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, to ensure that we are applying best practice approaches. Read more about the new 'Be heard' Hub page and new mechanisms to report grievances or raise concerns on pages 10 - 11.

I'd also like to acknowledge long serving Regional Managers Stephen Warren and Keith O'Brien, who have both recently retired. Together, Stephen and Keith have dedicated over 64 years' service to VICSES, and their leadership has shaped many of our units and members today.

In July, we welcomed Jane Foley to our VICSES Board. Bringing a wealth of executive and leadership experience across corporate and not-for-profit sectors, Jane is passionate about driving organisational development and positive workplace cultures, and will be a fantastic asset to our Board, and the growth of VICSES.

Finally, as Victoria experiences another period of lockdowns and restrictions due to COVID-19, it's more important than ever to look out for each other and maintain our health and wellbeing. Remember to check-in wherever you go, mask up, and adhere to the latest COVIDSafe directions, to keep our members and the community safe.

As always, I hope you enjoy this issue of *Community Matters*, and stay safe.

**Stephen Griffin
CEO Victoria State Emergency Service**





FEATURES

Severe storms and floods hit Victoria: Our busiest period on record

By Jessie Schliebs, Operations Business Coordinator, VHO

On 7 June, advice was received from the Bureau of Meteorology that there were initial indications forecasting 100-150mm of rain based on an East Coast Low, which could potentially impact parts of Gippsland from 8 June.

Based on this information, state, regional and local plans were immediately put in place to manage the potential impacts from this event, including establishing command and control arrangements, and supplementing local response resources with taskforces from South West, Mid West, North East, North West and Central Regions.

The predicated weather hit Victoria hard, with requests for assistance (RFAs) flooding in across the state. VICSES, alongside support from our partner agencies, provided immediate response. This included deployed Taskforces and ground crews to impacted areas in the East, Mid West, North West, North East and Central Regions, as well as personnel across a range of specialist Incident Management Team roles including logistics, media, planning, staging area management, operations and more.

At the height of the storm event, over 320,000 people across the state were without power, that also affected telecommunications for a number of communities. By the end of the event, over 2,300 initial impact assessments

had been conducted with 135 properties classified as damaged but habitable and 129 properties damaged and uninhabitable.

During the period of operations from 8 June to 8 July, 128 of our units contributed to responding to a total of 10,288 RFAs, including 7,776 trees down, 1,198 counts of building damage, and 350 flooding events. Some of our busiest units including Lilydale and Emerald received a year's worth of RFAs in just 48 hours – a mammoth, and challenging task at hand.

Our contributions as an organisation didn't stop there, with many members dedicating countless hours to ongoing recovery efforts for those communities hit the hardest. This included working alongside the Country Fire Authority and the Australian Defence Force to deliver and set-up almost 200 generators for community members that were without power for an extended period of time. Communities included townships in and around the Dandenong Ranges, such as Mt Dandenong, Olinda, Kalorama, and many more.



For the 2020-21 financial year, this event marked VICSES' second busiest year on record, with our busiest period ever recorded between 9 and 16 June 2021.

During our response and recovery efforts, our VICSES members demonstrated our Values and went above and beyond to support the community. As an organisation, we are thankful and proud of all our members and the professionalism they exhibited during this time. ■



MANY THANKS *Thank you all.*

Our busiest units*:

Lilydale

1,329 RFAS

Frankston

604 RFAS

Emerald

874 RFAS

Morwell

372 RFAS

Maroondah

600 RFAS

Hepburn Shire

316 RFAS

Woodend

604 RFAS

* 8 June - 8 July

Messages of thanks



The East Coast Low severe weather event that impacted Victoria in June stands as a historic event for our organisation and the affected communities.

As the single largest event in VICSES' history with over 10,000 Requests For Assistance (RFAs), our members undertook one of the most challenging response periods that we've ever seen, particularly given the COVID-19 environment as well.

Tragically, the extreme weather event recorded two fatalities in Woodside and Glenfyne. From tree carnage, damage to infrastructure, and road closures spread across the state, particularly in areas such as Trentham, Macedon, Dandenong and the Strezlecki Ranges, to riverine flooding across parts of Gippsland including Traralgon Creek, the devastation of this event was felt far and wide.

128 of our VICSES units were actively involved in our response and support, both locally and as part of taskforce deployments to some of our hardest hit areas, as well as across a range of integral Incident Management Team roles.

Although we were prepared for the potential impacts of this event, we could have never predicted the size and scale of what lay ahead of us, with the winds experienced exceeded the forecast in some parts of the state.

As always, our members have proven their ability to provide world-class response and recovery efforts in the face of extreme conditions. I had the privilege of visiting some of our busiest units just days after the severe weather



Tim Wiebusch
Chief Officer Operations

had occurred, including Lilydale, Emerald and Leongatha Units. Seeing the first-hand devastation of their communities was truly eye-opening, and put into perspective the long road ahead to recovery. It was also terrific to catch-up with members that had come from across the state to be part of Taskforces at both eastern Melbourne and Gippsland.

I am incredibly proud of each and every one of our members who have supported our response during this event, and cannot thank you all enough for your tireless efforts in ensuring the safety of our communities. Notably, the support of our members during the recovery phase for those communities with significant damage to infrastructure and power outages, has been truly remarkable.

I'd also like to recognise the support of our emergency service colleagues, including Country Fire Authority, Fire Rescue Victoria, Forest Fire Management Victoria, Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria, Australian Defence Force, as well as local government and more. The unity between our services has been integral to our response, and I thank you all for your assistance.

Finally, I'd like to take this opportunity to remind our members of the importance of our key Values, in particular 'Safety drives our decisions'. We cannot forget to look out for ourselves, and our colleagues when responding during such challenging events. Your wellbeing, health, and safety is foremost.

Thank you all, and stay safe out there.

Local students say thank you too!

The messages of thanks for our members spread far and wide, with local schools recognising the efforts of their VICSES heroes too! VICSES Craigieburn, Narre Warren, Nillumbik and Lilydale were just some of our units who were both surprised and heartened to receive dozens of hand-written letters and illustrations from students of Birmingham Primary School in Mount Evelyn, thanking them for helping their communities during June's severe weather.

Greg Wilson

Board Chair, Victoria State
Emergency Service



Andrew Crisp

Emergency Management
Commissioner, Victoria



On behalf of the Board, I would like to express my admiration and gratitude to all of our members who supported the impactful severe weather event in June of this year.

Since my appointment to the Board in February 2020, I have had the opportunity to witness the endless hours, expertise, and skills of our members across many challenging environments and conditions. No matter the weather, our members are there to keep our communities safe.

The storms and floods that tore through Victoria in June were devastating to so many communities. It was incredibly inspiring to see our members respond so quickly and efficiently, working around the

clock to ensure the safety of those at risk.

As our busiest period on record, it's events like this that truly shine a light on the dedication of our volunteers and staff, and just how much Victorians depend on the response of 'Our People'.

While there are still parts of our communities that are recovering from the impacts of this weather event, the ongoing support of our members alongside our emergency service colleagues is truly remarkable, demonstrating our vision: *Safer Communities - Together*.

I am in awe of the achievements of our members every day, and am proud to be a part of such an incredibly committed and driven organisation. **Thank you all.**

In many respects, the severe weather we saw in June was unlike anything we've had before in Victoria. With devastating floods in South Gippsland, to winds tearing through the Dandenongs, Yarra Ranges, South-West Gippsland and Central Victoria, I cannot overstate the impact to these communities. When travelling to some of our impacted regions, I was struck by the sheer size of some of the trees that had been uprooted and snapped in half. I'm sure many of you witnessed the destruction first-hand and put yourselves in harm's way to keep your communities safe.

I want to extend a big thank you to all our emergency service volunteers and staff, including a huge number of VICSES volunteers. Whether you were on

the ground working directly with communities, leading in command and control roles, or managing media and communications, you have done a fantastic job responding to an event of incredible scale and complexity.

An emergency of such significance requires a huge amount of work and coordination across countless agencies, bodies, organisations, councils, and departments, as well as at the local level between families, friends, and neighbours. I was impressed to see everyone working together so well, and consistently engaging with communities along the way. We also saw yet another example of volunteers keeping their communities safe while some had their own properties impacted – such a selfless contribution is at the core of volunteerism.

I was glad to make it out to several impacted communities over the past few months and to hear directly from VICSES volunteers on the ground. It was inspiring to see volunteers and community members in Traralgon, Kalorama, Olinda, Mt. Evelyn, Blackwood, Trentham, Woodend, Daylesford, and others pulling together to support each other. Thank you to all who took the time to brief me on your important work.

As we shift our focus now to the recovery phase, I want to remind all of you how important it is to take care of yourselves. As we continue to work through concurrent emergencies, with the COVID-19 pandemic still ongoing and summer fast approaching, we must remember to look out for each other and to take time to rest.

Thank you all again for your hard work. ■





Photo by Essendon Unit.



Emerald Unit.

FEATURES

Your photos from the field



Daylesford storm damage.



Mansfield Unit member.



VICSES volunteers and strike force support flooding in Leongatha.



South West members deployed to Daylesford.



Photo by Colac Unit.



Photo by Colac Unit.



Storm damage located in Emerald Unit response area.



Traralgon Incident Control Centre.



Taskforce Foxtrot

GENERAL NEWS



Diversity and inclusion at VICSES

By Chloe Jeffers, Senior Advisor Corporate Communications and Brand, VHO

"Strong in our diversity, united in our purpose; VICSES come together and support one another"

Together we are VICSES is one of our core values and represents a commitment to valuing our members, contractors and the community. We support an ethical, respectful, responsive and accountable culture to maintain

safety, fairness, and high standards in workplace conduct.

In recent months, VICSES has worked to improve our culture, by celebrating and supporting all our members regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, religion and sexuality. We are committed

to taking a leadership role in promoting equality for all who work in the emergency management sector.

As part of this focus on our diversity, a new Hub page has been established with the aim of putting a spotlight on the initiatives we are doing to be inclusive and celebrate our diversity. You can find the new Diversity and Inclusion page on the Hub under **My State > Membership > Diversity and inclusion**.

On this page you will find:

- Diversity and inclusion training for members, including the Respect and Equity training module - available in the Training Portal - with a new training series launching later in 2021.
- Information on the VICSES Gender Equality Project, which commenced with an audit to assess alignment and compliance with the Victorian Gender Equality Act, with gender champions appointed across the business to carry out this work.
- Details of how to take part in Pride March, International Women's Day, Movember and other diversity focused campaigns and events, including a catalogue of stories highlighting the contribution of our members towards diversity and inclusion at VICSES.
- Our Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners policy including templates, and our statement of intent.

Introducing "Be heard"

VICSES is a fantastic organisation filled with many great people all over the state. With increasing responses to the community and our partners over recent years, VICSES volunteers and staff have continued to answer the call and achieve great things to support our communities in times of need.

A new program to support our members further has been launched - *Be heard*. The *Be heard* page on the Hub brings together the available resources, services, policies and procedures and information to support you and other members to feel safe and supported.

Recent insights and reports, including an independent review into sexual harassment and discrimination within VICSES, suggest we have some issues in some parts of the state that must be addressed. Clearly there are

some problems to overcome, and together we must do everything we can to ensure you - whether a volunteer or staff member - are safe and supported in this service.

VICSES take any report of bullying, harassment, or misconduct of any kind very seriously.

If you have experienced or witnessed any of this conduct or behaviour, you are encouraged to come forward. You will be heard. We take your grievance seriously and will support you. We must together commit to driving a culture across the state that is

Be Heard

Reporting a grievance

To report an issue within VICSES, or for advice on what action to take, please contact **grievances@ses.vic.gov.au**. This email will go directly to the VICSES People and Organisational Development (POD) team, who will respond to you promptly.

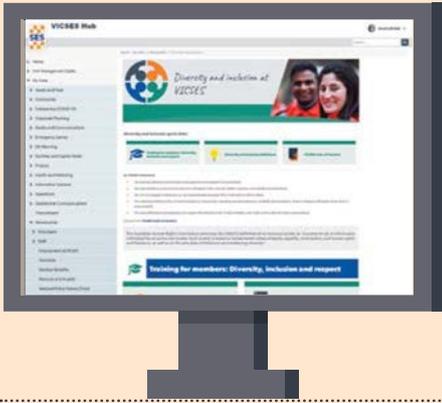
There is also a designated external confidential specialist support line (via our EAP provider Converge International) which you can contact on **0434 617 594**. These specialists are available for advice or support on grievances

or complaints surrounding bullying, harassment, discrimination, or misconduct. Your contributions will remain confidential if you wish.



aligned to Our Values, and a work environment that recognises, respects and values the diversity, abilities and contributions of us all.

You can find it by searching **'Be Heard'** on the Hub or by visiting: **hub.ses.vic.gov.au/my-state/membership/be-heard**



As part of the project, and Hub page launch, we are looking for members to lead the conversation. As our membership becomes more diverse, the importance of an inclusive workplace culture grows accordingly. A call for nominations to become a Diversity and Inclusion Leader will be made in the coming weeks. These leaders will be given access to resources and

support to guide conversations in their Unit and promote a supportive culture for all of our members.

As we continue to develop our Diversity and Inclusion page, your feedback is welcomed via email to publications@ses.vic.gov.au ■

Further improvements to our organisation and culture

We continue to work with members to improve our organisation and culture. In recent years, VICSES has:

- Commenced the roll-out of an online training program 'Respect and Equity at VICSES' – now completed by the vast majority of members.
- Identified Diversity, Gender and Inclusion champions across the state and conducted a number of workshops to broaden knowledge and practices with the service.
- Implemented new ground-up organisational values. These reflect who we are and guide the shared attitudes and behaviours of our members toward our vision of *Safer Communities - Together*.
- Built a Health and Wellbeing strategy, and are now

consulting widely across VICSES on our Mental Health and Wellbeing framework under that strategy.

- Added professional psychologists to staff to build on the extensive volunteer Peer Support network.
- Commenced a review of the VICSES Regulations which aims to provide a more contemporary approach to managing member conduct, including those that reach formal investigations and resolutions for volunteers.

Whatever is needed to continue to drive the contemporary and best practice standards to ensure each and every member feels safe and supported, we will do it. VICSES is built on its people and together we will ensure that VICSES continues to be a great organisation now, and into the future. ■



A VICSES superstar in the making: Meet Judd

By Gabi Barkmeyer, Corporate Communications Officer, VHO

During June's severe floods and storms, our volunteers weren't the only one's out and about helping to clear debris and support the community.

Six-year-old Judd, dressed in his own SES orange uniform, went viral after his mum Nicola filmed him clearing some small fallen branches in his local area after the storm. Posted to social media, the video soon caught traction nation-wide, appearing across the internet and television, warming the hearts of so many.

Judd's obsession with SES first began about a year ago, after a family friend's cousin, William Callaghan, went missing at Mount Disappointment.

"Although Judd didn't know William personally, he became very concerned when he saw that he was lost and alone," recounts Judd's mum Nicola.

"He would watch the news and ask his kinder teachers to give him updates throughout the day, and would spend his time coming up with ideas on how to find him. He was so happy that he was found, and since then has become obsessed with the SES and rescue."

Since the viral video of Judd helping out his community in his SES uniform, the response from the public has been incredible, with locals and even emergency service personnel stopping to say thanks to Judd for his support.

Upon seeing Judd across social media, our members wanted to give their thanks as well. In June, Essendon Unit arranged a special meet and greet, giving Judd a

tour of the truck, the equipment, having a chat, and even gifting Judd with his very own SES helmet, toy chainsaw, and SES truck lunchbox! Our members didn't leave empty handed either, with a thoughtful hand-illustrated card presented to the Essendon Unit from Judd.

"The impact on Judd has been enormous. As parents, we couldn't be more proud of him. We can't thank everyone involved enough for giving Judd that incredible experience," said Nicola of Judd meeting with Essendon Unit volunteers.

Although just six-years-old, Judd is already counting down the birthdays until he's old enough to join VICSES. In fact, he's already quite prepared, carrying a first aid and survival kit everywhere he goes, and even introducing himself as "Judd Feeney from Essendon SES".

"Judd is most excited about specialising vertical rescues," says Nicole.

"During lockdown and home learning he made a book called 'Judd's guide on how to survive', a book to get you out of trouble if there's an earthquake, flood, and other dangerous situations. I think he will be very prepared for when he can officially join!"

It's safe to say that we're also counting down the years until Judd can join the ranks of his local unit. Until then, we're proud to have Judd as part of our orange family! ■



CAMPAIGNS & EVENTS

International Youth Day: The leaders of tomorrow, today

By David Murphy, Media Officer, VHO

This year, 12 August marked International Youth Day – an opportunity to highlight the contributions of young people across our communities, who are the driving force of change in the world.

Our youngest volunteers - the future leaders of our organisation - are a part of this change. Some of our youth members have grown up with their local VICSES unit, either because their parents were members, or they joined themselves from the age of 15. At the VICSES Colac Unit, it's a family affair.

"We developed the junior program when my daughter Makayla joined," says Colac Unit Controller Steven Tevelein, whose son Jayden and partner Renee are also members. "She's 19 now, and moved up to seniors."

"Most things I learn I take back to work with me," says daughter Makayla of her experience with VICSES.

"I had very little confidence with people until I joined VICSES. Being around people and being able

to talk to adults and building that up... knowing that you can actually help people, is a big part of that."

"I guess I was looking for something. I was looking to get more out of life," continues sibling Jayden, who is currently a junior member.

"I've learned my community is full of a lot of great people who want to help each other out. Everyone cares about each other, and because of VICSES' level of outreach in the community, it runs pretty deep in our country town."

For junior members in lockdown, their training included checking in on their mental health, as well getting to know the other members of the unit.

"I joined VICSES Bacchus Marsh two weeks after I turned 15, just at the end of 2019. I'm their



youngest member," says junior unit member Molly Ovenden.

"I know that COVID-19 has affected a lot of the unit activities so I feel like my experience has been very different compared to other newer members, but I am still able to go out to between one and five jobs a week. And I do feel a lot more confident... it's changed a lot personally for me. My career objective, I always wanted to be a vet. But when I joined VICSES I thought 'I want to do this for the rest of my life,' so I'm going to be a paramedic!"

At VICSES Chiltern Unit, they have an expansive junior members' program. It includes Adelaide Roach, 19, who joined four years ago as a junior and has remained there as a youth leader. Adelaide supports the junior members across a wide range of training and initiatives, including mental health sessions to help manage stress and anxiety.

"Honestly? Join as soon as you can. It's great for personal development and communications skills. I hated speaking in public, but now I have the confidence to do that," says Adelaide.

"Growing up, my dad was in the army and away a lot, and I didn't really see him that much. When he joined VICSES I decided to join as a way to connect with him and get closer to him, then I ended up loving it," Adelaide continues.

Rebecca van der Veeke, 17, is another junior member at VICSES Chiltern Unit. Supporting her fellow members with response to storm damage and more, her membership with VICSES has opened up another career path for her in cybersecurity.

"I actually got a place to study at La Trobe University by volunteering with VICSES," says Rebecca,

"There's an early admissions programme called 'Aspire', and La Trobe University really values VICSES as a volunteer organisation and our members."

At Leongatha Unit, Jade Rhoden, 19, is already in her fourth year of service and the units appointed Deputy Controller.

"I've had so many experiences I wouldn't have otherwise, and the qualifications you get are looked upon so highly, at universities and workplaces. I was lucky that the unit I joined was extremely supportive - there were obviously some hurdles to cross, but they were so supportive of tasks we wanted to do and skills we wanted to gain."

"The culture within our unit has really shifted away from that men's club kind-of-thing," continues Jade.

"People are realising that the youth are the future; the leaders of tomorrow." ■



Australasian Police and Emergency Service Games

By Gerry Sheridan, Operations Officer, VHO

Registrations for the Australasian Police and Emergency Services (AP&ES) Games in 2022 are now open. The games will be held in Rotorua, New Zealand from 4 March to 11 March 2022.

To register and for a comprehensive list of the included sports, program and pricing structure, head to the games website at www.apes2022.co.nz

The games organisers are offering full refunds should COVID-19 affect travel arrangements for the event. ■



More information

Further information is available on the Hub under **My State > Emergency Service Games**, or by contacting VICSES Operations Officer **Gerry Sheridan** via emergencyservicegames@ses.vic.gov.au

Use the QR code to access the **2022 AP&ES Games** promotional video.

See you there!

Hawks and BankVic recognise VICSES



By David Murphy, Media Officer, VHO

VICSES Lilydale Unit volunteer Tim Isherwood has been honoured as one of this year's BankVic Emergency Services Champions, for his work following the state's severe weather in June.

The BankVic Emergency Services Champions campaign is an annual campaign partnering with Hawthorn Football Club to recognise the contributions of emergency service personnel across Victoria.

Tim was recognised as part of this year's campaign for his integral role as a Lilydale Unit volunteer during June's devastating severe weather. Lilydale Unit alone received 1,329 requests for assistance during the period of operations, with Tim contributing countless hours of support alongside his fellow unit members.

Tim was presented with his award and thanked for his contributions as part of the Hawthorn Football Clubs Presidents dinner, as well as at the Hawthorn vs Port Adelaide AFL game on the big screen.

"It was a huge privilege to be asked to attend the night, and one I know both Deb and I will not forget," said Tim reflecting on the president's dinner event alongside his wife.

"As a Hawthorn supporter, it was made even more special to be at the game for Shaun Burgoyne's 400th match."

Central Region Manager Ray Jasper who nominated Tim to be recognised, acknowledged Tim's hard work in helping VICSES respond during our busiest event on record.

"Tim responded that night when called upon, and for the challenging week that followed," said Ray.



We are proud of Tim, and we are proud of all of our VICSES members for the significant work they achieved following the recent storm event."

Congratulations Tim on being honoured for your dedication as part of our emergency services! ■





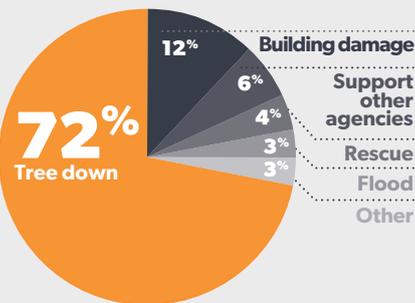
CENTRAL

1 April – 30 June



2,004
Volunteers

7,963
Requests for assistance



A close call for Emerald Unit

By Ben Owen, Emerald Unit Controller, Central Region



On 9 June, during one of Melbourne’s wildest severe weather events, Emerald Unit received an emergency call-out to a person trapped by a tree in their home.

Responding to one of hundreds of requests for assistance, the responding crew arrived on scene quickly to locate and bring the trapped person to safety. During the rescue, a large tree suddenly fell across the unit’s emergency response vehicle (Emerald Support 2), completely crushing the occupant cabin.

The responding four members thankfully were not in or near the vehicle at the time, although just metres away assisting Ambulance Victoria paramedics. Despite the howling winds and constant sound of branches breaking and trees falling around them, the crew continued to work to free the trapped resident and carry him to the ambulance.

As the casualty was safely transported inside the back of the ambulance, VICSES Lilydale Unit arrived on scene. Crews quickly gathered some of the equipment from the damaged VICSES vehicle and stored it onto the Lilydale Unit truck, as well as a Country Fire Authority (CFA) vehicle that had also made it on scene. Then it was time for crew members to assist the

ambulance off the mountain, all while the destructive winds continued the onslaught, bringing down more trees.

Three of the Emerald Unit crew travelled on board the Lilydale Unit truck, while another member travelled in the ambulance, stopping to clear trees and branches in the path of the vehicles as they made their descent.

Finally making their way out of Mount Dandenong, members were transported back to the VICSES Lilydale Unit local headquarters. At this stage, it was not certain if the crew could safely return to Emerald, and the decision was made to keep the crew safe at Lilydale Unit for the remainder of the

evening in a safe and warm environment. Thankfully, the crew was able to get back home safely the next morning.

A big thank you to Lilydale Unit Controller Sean Caufield for assisting our members on the night. We're also thankful to hear that the trapped resident should make a full recovery, after a week-long stay in hospital.

As for the vehicle, a brand new 2021 model vehicle is soon to be on its way to our unit, after the State Government determined it a high replacement priority. While vehicles are replaceable, people are not, and we’re so glad to have everyone made it out alive. ■





LILYDALE UNIT AGAINST THE STORM

By Shaun Caulfield, Lilydale Unit Controller, Central Region

The storm that swept across Victoria in June was an event that showcased how VICSES and the community come together to deal with all levels of adversity.

The devastation caused by the 'East Coast Low' that started mid-afternoon on Wednesday June 9, was something that is rarely seen outside of the tropics. When two of our members, with 80 years of VICSES experience between them, both considered this to be the most devastating storm they have experienced, we really knew we were dealing with an event of some significance.

The pager was going non-stop for nine hours. Starting with the usual tree down jobs, then a swift water rescue event early in the evening, and then more and more tree related events, with trees falling on buildings, roads, and sheds.

Then, as the winds picked up further around 10:00PM, we received the first of a flurry of rescue events. One particular job, our members had to find a way through Mount Dandenong to assist a man trapped under his house after a tree had landed on it. With trees still falling around the crew, they cut through to the property alongside VICSES Emerald Unit and Ambulance Victoria paramedics, and transported the patient to hospital. This kind of rescue was repeated on several occasions that night, and in the following days our unit assisted Ambulance Victoria in rescuing several people from their homes.

The work didn't stop when the wind stopped. We were assisted by 19 different units, as well as the Country Fire Authority, Fire Rescue Victoria,

and Forest Fire Management Victoria, who all undertook various roles in clearing the 1,329 requests for assistance that Lilydale Unit received during the event's period of operations.

The most fitting word to describe the infrastructure in the areas that we responded to would be 'obliterated'. Not one single powerline was left intact in the suburb of Kalorama. Hundreds of power poles were damaged, and power was going to be out for weeks. Our members were on the ground for 22 consecutive days.

During our work around Kalorama, we found the community in desperate need. It started with providing a generator so people could charge their devices. The community then established their own 'local hub'. Formal assistance was slow to arrive, delayed in part by the lack of accessible roads to the area. Our unit harnessed the power of social media to get some community driven support in the form of donations of food and much needed supplies like fuel and generators.

The response we received was overwhelming, with engagement from locals and non-locals alike. One great achievement was being able to get the amazing people from *OrangeSky* to bring their mobile washing machine vans to the area. A fact that may be lost on many, was that it wasn't as simple as packing your

clothes in the car and driving 30-40 minutes to a laundromat. Most of the people in Kalorama couldn't get off the mountain because their cars were destroyed or stuck behind fallen trees. With power looking to be out for weeks, the seemingly simple act of being able to wash your clothes was something that was so very much appreciated by the community. It brought many smiles, to many faces.

The locals rallied to help themselves as much as they could with the community driven hub. Community members were able to organise some support, while we continued to ensure via social media that people were aware of the situation, as it was getting very little mainstream media. Donations continued to come in, and the community was well placed to manage. Eventually, once resources were in place, we were able to move out.

There will be much the learn from this event, but one thing we have learnt already is that our communities rally together when needed to. Our unit showed it was able to rise to the challenge - from our group of experienced members, to our youngest and newest recruits - everyone got involved. As the Lilydale Unit Controller, I couldn't be prouder of what we as a unit, and as an organisation, achieved. ■





EAST

1 April – 30 June

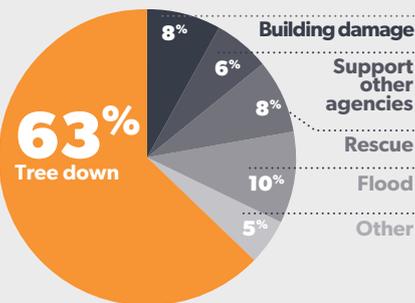


659

Volunteers

1,557

Requests for assistance



VICSES Buchan Unit celebrates 300 years of collective service

By Merryn Henderson, Community Resilience Coordinator, East Region



On Sunday 16 May, past and present members of VICSES, alongside their family and friends, gathered to celebrate the service achievements of long-standing volunteers from Buchan Unit.

The Buchan Unit was established in 1980, and currently has 22 members who support their community in times of need.

The day was spent recognising individual efforts of unit members, as well as celebrating 41 years of operating as a unit and approximately 300 years combined service by the unit's members.

VICSES Buchan Unit Controller Kevin McCole, also known as Jim, received a service medal for 35 years service with the unit.

"Being a part of VICSES is just something you do when you live in a small town," said Kevin.

"You help each other out when things get tough, and all

work together for the sake of the community."

Other award recipients included:

35 YEARS OF SERVICE:

- Lindsay Fall
- Geoffrey Hodge
- Sandra Maiden

30 YEARS OF SERVICE:

- Megan and Dean Phelan
- Roslyn McCole

10 YEARS OF SERVICE:

- Ean Free
- Lynton Hill

In addition to these achievements, members were also presented with commemorative pins in

recognition of service provided during the 2019-20 Victorian bushfires.

"It was really special to be able to recognise and present the members with the commemorative pins, as each member from the Buchan Unit was touched by this event. Not only on a support level, but on a personal level too," said East Regional Manager, Anthony McLean.

VICSES Chief Operations Officer Tim Wiebusch also attended the special event to help present the awards to unit members.

"I was delighted to spend time with the Buchan Unit volunteers in recognising their outstanding service and commitment to their community," said Tim.

Congratulations to all of the award recipients, and the Buchan Unit for your ongoing dedication to VICSES and the community. ■



Warragul Unit awards night

By Jane Fontana, Community Resilience Coordinator, East Region

VICSES Warragul Unit recently celebrated the dedicated service achievements of their volunteer members and the support provided by their families, at a special function night in July at Warragul Country Club.

Awards presented on the night included several National Medals and clasps. The National Medal recognises those who have spent at least 15 years risking their lives at the service of the community, and clasps acknowledging every additional 10 years of service.

National Medals were presented to David Richards and Findlay (Rex) Skinner, along with

first clasps to Cath Wood, David Sparks, John McLennan, Kenneth Allan and Peter Wood. Amanda Allan and Linda Bayley received their National Medals and first clasps in the same presentation, and Robert Vermay received his first and second clasp.

All together, these members have dedicated an incredible 150 years of combined service just in National Medals, which is a huge achievement.

Several other VICSES Service Awards were also presented on the evening, including:

30 YEARS OF SERVICE:

- Cath Wood

25 YEARS OF SERVICE:

- Rex Skinner
- Linda Bayley
- Kenneth Allan
- John McLennan

20 YEARS OF SERVICE:

- David Richards

10 YEARS OF SERVICE:

- Trevor Kitt

5 YEARS OF SERVICE:

- Zoe Hall
- Julie Ziebe
- Jamie Magyar
- Caz Hall

Altogether, this is an additional 180 years of combined service achieved by members at Warragul Unit.

“We are extremely proud of what our members have achieved”, said Warragul Unit Controller, Alan Male.

“Their dedication and commitment speak for itself, and we could not be more grateful for their time and investment in protecting their community.” ■

MANY THANKS

Gippsland storms statistics

By Jane Fontana, Community Resilience Coordinator, East Region

The severe storms that ripped through Gippsland in early June resulted in many areas being impacted by strong winds and heavy rain, causing widespread damage, flooding and power outages.

Over the five-day period from midnight on 9 June when the bad weather started to cross Gippsland, 1,185 requests for assistance (RFAs) were received by East Region units. Of these, 759 were for trees down, 94 for building damage, 121 for flooding, and 57 rescues for people trapped.

Morwell Unit was the busiest unit with 360 RFAs, followed by Leongatha Unit with 130, and Warragul with 126. Foster and Yarram both had around 85 RFAs each, while our four

units on Bass Coast, Phillip Island, Inverloch, Wonthaggi and San Remo Units, received a total of 180 RFAs.

17,363 hours of dedicated work was contributed by East Region volunteers across the five-day period, responding operationally on-the-ground, alongside roles in Incident Management Teams across the region.

Thank you to all of our members for your service, in keeping our communities safe. ■



MID WEST

1 April – 30 June

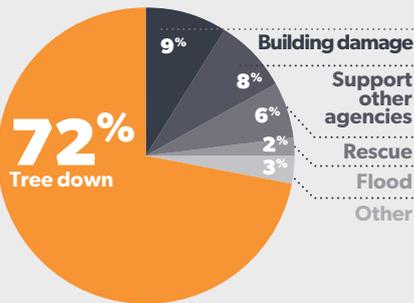


404

Volunteers

791

Requests for assistance



WHEN THE STORM HITS,

Emergency Service Comradery Shines



By Jane Patton, Community Resilience Coordinator, Mid West Region

The Mid West Region has been extremely busy responding to requests for assistance since the severe storms and flooding back in June.

Areas surrounding Ballarat, Buninyong, Ballan, Trentham, Blackwood, Gordon, Daylesford, Greendale, and Bacchus Marsh were among the locations in the Mid West that were significantly affected by the event.

From 8 June to 15 June, the Mid West Region responded to 522 requests for assistance (RFAs), with the Hepburn Shire Unit receiving 262 RFAs in just four days.

Alongside Hepburn Unit, our other busiest units included Ararat, Ballarat and Bacchus Marsh.

Even well after the weather event occurred, our volunteers have continued to support their communities with the aftermath of the storm.

On behalf of Mid West Region, we'd like to acknowledge

the extraordinary efforts and countless hours of service that our volunteers have provided to keep their communities safe, as well as our volunteers families and friends for their ongoing support and hard work too.

Our gratitude extends to the fantastic support from neighbouring units, including volunteers from Sunbury and Woodend who were willing to assist our affected communities. We'd also like to acknowledge our region's own volunteers who were deployed to assist with Incident Management and operational roles in Gippsland. During events like this, it truly shows the wonderful comradery that exists as part of our VICSES family.

We'd also like to give our appreciation to our partner agencies, including Country

Fire Authority, Victoria Police, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Ambulance Victoria, VicRoads, Powercor local government, and all the associated local businesses and contractors who've worked tirelessly to clear roads, restore services and provide relief and support.

It has been an incredible period of response and recovery across the Mid West Region and Victoria, with our volunteers going above and beyond to ensure the community is safe and reassured.

Our thoughts are with all the communities that have been impacted, and the challenges that we still face in the aftermath. Stay safe. ■



Ballarat Unit are Snap Send Solve ready for flooding!

By Clare Mintern, Flood Project Support, Mid West Region

Responding to floods in a timely manner is extremely critical for VICSES, especially when large flood events occur.

Snap Send Solve is an app that's used to share flood photos via the administration portal Emergency Management Common Operating Picture (EM-COP). The Snap Send Solve tool is used to substantially improve the efficiency and effectiveness of VICSES acquiring flood intelligence, and significantly improves VICSES's capability of managing flood emergencies.

The Ballarat Unit are aware of their local significant flood risk, with over 50% of Ballarat's urban area prone to flooding. When impacted by a significant flood event, more than 684 buildings will be flooded above floor level, and more than 8,751 properties will be impacted.

Given there is a lack of stream gauge monitoring in Ballarat, VICSES is reliant on evidence such as flood photos before a community flood warning can be published. This makes the use of Snap Send Solve critical to warning the Ballarat community of their flood risk.

Ballarat Unit Deputy Controller Craig West gained a lot of experience using Snap

Send Solve during the October 2020 Port Fairy flood event. He assisted in providing real-time, on-the-ground flood intelligence to the Warrnambool Incident Control Centre, which assisted with creating a clear picture of the flooding impacts quickly and efficiently. After the event Craig understood just how useful Snap Send Solve was, and was keen to share his knowledge with his unit.

Given the recent rainfall and the saturation levels of the local catchment, Ballarat Unit felt it was important to be proactive and undertake a Snap Send Solve training exercise. Craig and fellow Ballarat Unit Deputy Controller Cameron Maher led a training exercise with the unit in June, which enabled their 26 members who have completed training to put their knowledge into practice.

Periodic Snap Send Solve training exercises throughout the year will enable our Ballarat members to be confident in using the app when flooding events occur, including the recent storm and flood events across Victoria.

For further information regarding Snap Send Solve, visit the **Hub>My State> EM Planning> Flood> Floodplain Management.** ■



FOUR QUESTIONS WITH LORRAINE KELL

We sit down with St Arnaud Unit volunteer Lorraine Kell and chat about her experience as a VICSES volunteer.

Hello Lorraine! Can you tell us what brought you to VICSES?

I was inspired to join VICSES when my granddaughter had a car accident, and VICSES volunteers were on-scene to cut her out of the vehicle. I was so grateful to VICSES for helping to save her life, and I felt like I had to give back. My husband Fred becoming a volunteer with VICSES was what also sparked my interest in joining!

What roles do you undertake for your unit?

Over the last 15 years, I have undertaken a broad range of roles and jobs within VICSES, including road crash rescue, repairing roof damage, radio communications operator, and as a Community Engagement Facilitator. My main focus now is community engagement and managing the St Arnaud Diver Reviver site.

I mostly enjoy the opportunity to meet people from all around Australia, including people that I wouldn't normally meet and hearing their stories. I also enjoy making VICSES show bags for kids, which they are always very excited to receive. As a volunteer, I get a lot of satisfaction out of being able to help people in the community.

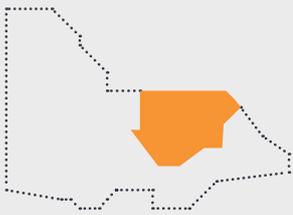
How has the support been from your unit since you joined?

I have gained so many friends while involved in VICSES. When I lost two of my grandchildren in a house fire I didn't cope very well. The friends I made in VICSES became my extended family and provided me the support I needed to get through such a difficult time, which meant the world to me.

Who or what inspires you the most?

I'm most inspired by my grandfather who was a Lighthorseman in WW1, and fought in the battle of Beersheeba. I have a passion for reading about the Lighthorseman and getting to know more about what they went through. I was disappointed when the ANZAC Day March was cancelled due to COVID-19, as it's an incredibly special day to reflect on their bravery and the sacrifices that they made for us. But I still honoured the day regardless, and hope to be able to attend next year. ■





NORTH

EAST

1 April – 30 June

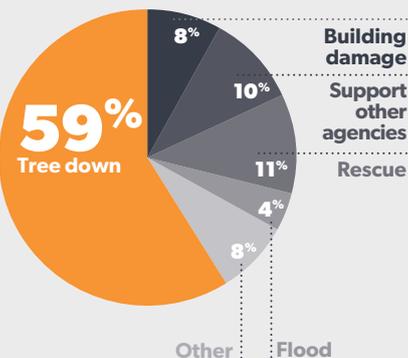


707

Volunteers

839

Requests for assistance



Brothers in Emergencies

By Sue Sheldrick, Community Resilience Coordinator, North East Region

Bright Unit Deputy Controller Graham Gales and brother, Country Fire Authority (CFA) Wangaratta Group Officer Lachlan (Lachie) Gales, rarely get the chance to work together on the same emergency.

This might come as a surprise to some, even though both brothers have served a combined service of 73 years with their respective agencies.

as they take up the opportunity to use modern meeting facilities at VICSES Wangaratta Local Headquarters. Here's hoping Graham and Lachie get to cross paths in the emergency field once again! ■

However, the planets finally aligned earlier this year during a North East Region Incident Management Team set-up to manage a local storm and flood event. Alas, it was a near miss, as the brothers ended up on separate night and day shifts!

Never to miss such a unique opportunity for sharing a family snap, the Gales' brothers allowed us to capture and share this special brotherly moment. Thank you to both Graham and Lachie for their amazing dedication in protecting and supporting our communities across Victoria.

Lachie and the CFA Wangaratta Group will soon be working more closely with VICSES



Thanking our North East Region members

By North East Regional Management Team, Keith O'Brien, Neil Payn and Brendan Corboy, North East Region

The North East Regional Management Team recognises that our region's volunteers have contributed an enormous amount of service across the last few months, demonstrating great focus and adaptability in achieving

our VICSES Vision: *Safer Communities - Together.*

Whether it be catching planes to join emergency deployment efforts in faraway places, supporting neighbouring units and regions in response to the severe floods and storms in June, stepping up to fill

unfamiliar roles, or making yourselves available for taskforces - all while standing by to maintain coverage and response for your local communities in the midst of a global pandemic. Thank you all, for your incredible efforts. ■



END OF AN ERA:

VICSES farewells Keith O'Brien



By Liz Frazer and Sue Sheldrick, Community Resilience Coordinators, North East Region

As the sun sets on Keith O'Brien's huge 36+ years in emergency management (32 of them with VICSES), he enters retirement and we say thanks and farewell!

Keith's experience and contributions across our emergency services is remarkable, with a legacy that will be long lasting; not just in North East Region or VICSES, but right across the sector.

Keith's SES journey first began with NSW SES in 1985. In 1989 Keith joined VICSES Bendigo Unit, has been the long-standing North East Regional Manager since 2004, and has taken on many short-term roles around the state. Here are just some of the operations Keith has contributed to in his many roles:

- 1999 Sydney Hailstorm.
- 2003 Bendigo Tornado.
- 2003 Canberra Bushfires.
- 2009 Victorian Bushfires.
- 2009 Boxing Day Tsunami.
- 2013 Cobram to Bundalong Tornado.
- 2018 Hume Freeway Flash Flood.
- 2019-2020 Victorian Bushfires.
- COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2021 NSW Floods.
- Other major flood events in 1993, 2007, 2010, 2012, 2016 and 2021.

In addition to supporting these events, Keith's hard work and dedication has also been recognised across many honours and awards, including:

- Order of St John.
- National Emergency Medal.
- National Medal First Clasp.
- St John Long Service Medal.
- VICSES Long Service Medal.

"Keith has been a significant leader and contributor to the development of VICSES for over three decades. Having the pleasure of working with Keith for all of his working career at

VICSES, his passion to see our organisation succeed and be a leading agency within the sector has been influential on so many others," said VICSES Chief Officer Operations Tim Wiebusch on Keith's retirement.

Keith begins his transition into retirement alongside his lovely wife Jo, planning a move to Canberra, a sailing adventure, many years of travel, photography, and precious family time with children and grandchildren.

On behalf of the North East Region, VICSES and the emergency management sector, we wish Keith all the best! ■



Send-offs from across the sector:

"Keith has been a committed emergency management leader in the Hume Region for the past 17 years, and the Country Fire Authority (CFA) in the North East consider him a great friend of ours. His contributions have been valuable through fire, floods, storm and blue green algae incidents. Keith is an energetic character who loves to share stories and information from his broad range of experiences from emergencies, or his interests outside of work! We wish him and his family well in the next part of his life, and suspect we will see him continue to pop up at emergencies in the future in a variety of roles." – **CFA Assistant Chief Fire Officer Paul King, and CFA Hume Regional Operations Coordinator, Hayley Thomas.**

"As a key member of the VICSES Incident Management Team (IMT) Training and Development group, Keith's passions have included contributing to developing our annual IMT program, demystifying and walking members through the Level 2 accreditation process, continuous improvement in our coaching and mentoring capabilities, ensuring members get the most out of their PSI assessment progressing to Level 3 Accreditation, and being a regular member on multi-agency Level 3 panels, ensuring the 'best of the best' of Victoria's IMT talent progress to Level 3." – **VICSES Deputy Chief Officer, David Baker.**

"I'd like to thank Keith for his efforts in supporting the Hume Regional Emergency Management Planning Committee and the Hume Region community in general, in particular the work he has done to support VICSES and Emergency Management Team readiness levels for storm events. I appreciate Keith had to influence state for this to happen, and the levels of readiness has now moved the agency from being reactive to proactive, providing the Hume community with a gold star service model." – **Victoria Police Hume Regional Emergency Management Inspector, Pauline Williams.**

"On many occasions I worked with Keith during the response and transition to recovery phase. Keith's commitment to ensuring that the impacted communities were provided with everything they needed during these stressful times resulted in the Hume Region communities receiving the very best support. Keith's contribution to the development of the Emergency Management arrangements in Victoria has created a strong platform for now and into the future. All the best." – **Department of Families, Fairness and Housing Hume Regional Recovery Manager, Leo Ryan.**



NORTH

WEST

1 April – 30 June

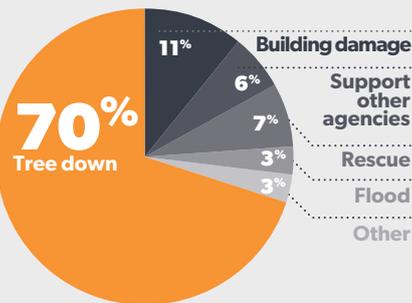


624

Volunteers

1,245

Requests for assistance



Wild weather causes unprecedented damage



By Karen Dunstan, Community Resilience Coordinator, North West Region

While there’s been a lot of focus on the Dandenong Ranges and the east of Victoria following the severe weather in June, in the southern reaches of the North West Region the Macedon Ranges also experienced unprecedented storms, resulting in more than 700 requests for assistance (RFAs) for our Woodend and Gisborne units.

An Incident Control Centre was established from 10 June, reverting to a Regional Operations Coordination Centre on 14 June.

The response effort was supported by units from across the North West Region, Country Fire Authority (CFA), Parks Victoria and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

Along with widespread power losses for up to six days, hundreds of properties were impacted and scores of homes were damaged, making many uninhabitable. Numerous outbuildings and cars were also destroyed. Critical infrastructure was isolated, with crews from Parks Victoria undertaking substantial works to access communications towers on top of Mount Macedon. Tree losses numbered in the thousands, with compromised trees continuing to fall for weeks after the incident, even in mild winds. State and regional parks closed for several months to ensure public safety.

In addition to responding to hundreds of RFAs, our volunteers went above and beyond to support the community by dropping food parcels to isolated properties, checking in

on vulnerable residents, and distributing newsletters to affected households and businesses.



MANY THANKS

The affected community showed its appreciation for the tremendous efforts of our volunteers, with local businesses dropping in food to keep stomachs full and spirits high. There was also spontaneous applause in local shops and an outpouring of love on local social media.

Thank you to all of our members for your support, and tireless work during this time. ■

Castlemaine Emergency Response Expo

By Daniel Bone, Deputy Controller, Castlemaine Unit and Karen Dunstan, Community Resilience Coordinator, North West Region

Castlemaine residents took advantage of some spectacular weather in May to check out the inaugural Castlemaine Emergency Response Expo.

VICSES Castlemaine Unit initiated the expo and arranged it in partnership with Country Fire Authority, Victoria Police and Mount Alexander Shire Council.

The free community event featured local and regional emergency services who were on hand to educate, demonstrate and encourage residents to be prepared for all emergencies. There might have been some recruitment going on too!

VICSES had a huge presence; the Mobile Command

Vehicle, Field Operations Vehicle, Rescue Boat, Mule and rescue truck, lighting trailers and 4WD's were all on show. The North West Region Headquarters Unit was also there with the community education trailer. On display were large scale flood maps where locals could look up their property, helping to contextualise their flood risk.

Members of other units joined the Castlemaine Unit and Ambulance Victoria for a road crash rescue demonstration, which was performed in front of an enthusiastic crowd.

In addition to VICSES, CFA and the Mount Alexander Shire Council, other participating agencies and organisations included Victoria Police, Forest Fire Management Victoria, Red Cross, and Fire Rescue Victoria.

The brilliant weather ensured that every emergency service was kept busy with a constant stream of visitors to every stall. The event was a great success, and all the emergency services who attended are keen to take part in the next Castlemaine Emergency Services Expo. ■

Staff movements in the North West

By Karen Dunstan, Community Resilience Coordinator, North West Region

The North West Region said farewell – if only for a time – to a couple of our staff members in August.

Our Regional Training Support Officer, Fiona Bayly headed off on maternity leave for bub number two, and Col Weeding's role backfilling the Regional Trainer position has come to an end. However, we'll still see Col around the traps, as he is one of our casual trainers and a volunteer for our Mildura Unit.

In August we also welcomed Jessica Parker and Emily Caruso, who are job sharing the Regional Administration Officer role for the northern part of our region. Jessica is based in Mildura and Emily in Swan Hill.

We are excited to have Jessica and Emily on board, thank Col for his work, and congratulate Fiona on the new addition to her family! ■





SOUTH

WEST

1 April – 30 June

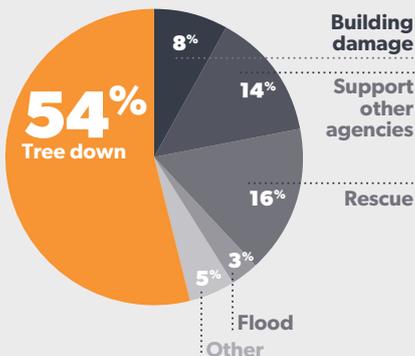


630

Volunteers

628

Requests for assistance



Engaging at Port Fairy Unit!

By Bess Krause, Community Resilience Coordinator, South West Region



Stephen McDowell wears many hats - father, skilled mechanic, 3rd Lieutenant Country Fire Authority volunteer, avid Geelong footy club supporter, and a Unit Controller at VICSES Port Fairy Unit.

Stephen is a big advocate for VICSES engaging with their community, and throughout his 27 years with the Port Fairy Unit has fostered strong connections between the service and the local council, businesses, media, and residents.

Prior to COVID-19, the Port Fairy Unit was involved in over 20 community support and engagement activities a year, ranging from representation at the local Emergency Service Expo and door-knocking in flood prone areas, to holding stands at shows and festivals and supporting the Tower Hill Challenge – a local mud run, which draws people from across the region.

“It’s important to be in the public eye, so that the community are aware of what we do and when they should call us. It also helps us to get to know the community we serve,” says Stephen.

When the unit’s members aren’t physically out and about in the community, they maintain a very active Facebook page, with almost 1,500 followers who show a high level of engagement and support on their page.

“Throughout the pandemic we’ve been making sure that we’re letting the community know that we’re still here to respond to their

needs. They may not be able to see us out and about as much, but we’re still here for them as always,” says Stephen.

Stephen also holds a monthly radio slot on ABC Radio South West Victoria, where he discusses upcoming engagement events, recent storm and flood operations, and shares VICSES safety messages.

“Community engagement is a team effort. It needs the support of the membership to facilitate it effectively” says Stephen.

“During the flooding in October 2020, it was clear that the work we’d done in the community previously had meant that those in flood risk areas knew what to do to stay safe, and it reduced the workload of our members during what was a very busy time.”

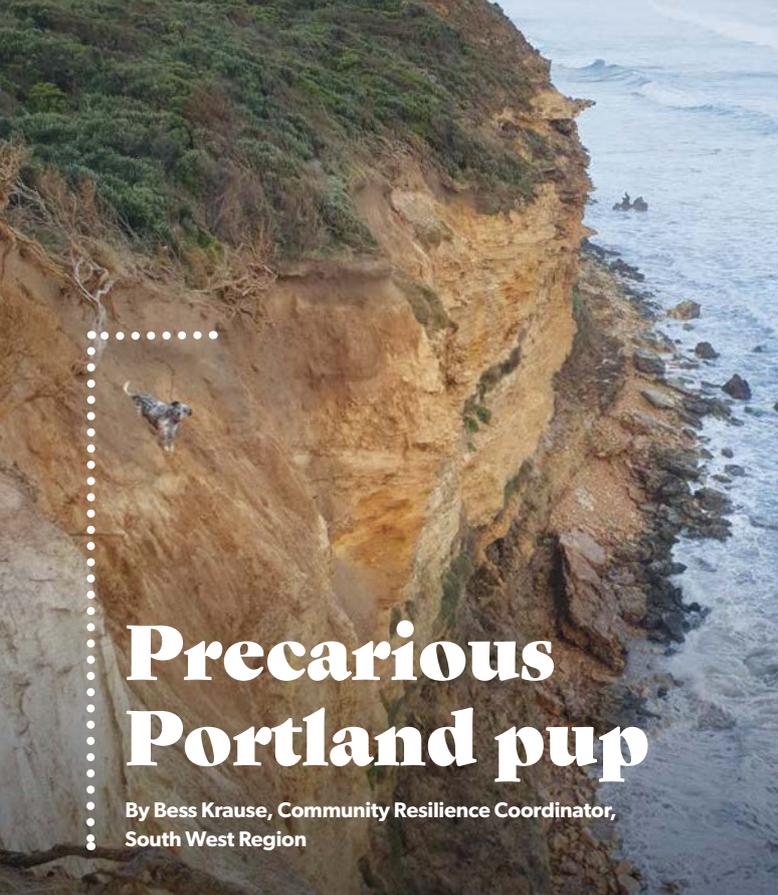
Port Fairy Unit is a great example of consistent and regular engagement with the community, and the impacts on community safety and service support that it can influence.

“Community engagement is certainly a skillset, but it’s such a beneficial thing to do, and I encourage all VICSES units to get involved,” says Stephen. ■

More CEFs in the South West!

By Melanie Gill and Bess Krause, Community Resilience Coordinators, South West Region

At VICSES, we are part of our community. The work that Community Engagement Facilitators (CEFs) achieve is critical to living this key Value.



Precarious Portland pup

By Bess Krause, Community Resilience Coordinator, South West Region

In July, a beloved family dog named Shelby ventured out onto a cliff face and became stuck, with a 25 meter drop below. The scene was tense, as onlookers willed the stranded pooch to remain still while the high angle rescue crew, made up of both VICSES Portland Unit members and Fire Rescue Victoria members, set

up the high angle rescue system and completed safety checks.

The rescue crew worked to lower a VICSES member over the cliff edge to where Shelby was perched, about two meters below. After securing the dog into the safety system (usually used for two-legged patients who need assistance), they completed a successful ascent,

In May, the South West Region ran two CEF courses held in Warrnambool and Geelong respectively, adding another 22 qualified CEFs to the region.

The CEF course had only recently completed a major transformation, with the updated course building upon existing community education, shifting the focus from an 'inform' approach to one of 'engagement'. The course has four modules, is aligned with the Community Engagement Program Framework, and uses highly interactive activities to assist with objective

setting, audience analysis, key messages, engagement, behaviour change, and resources. Each module includes reflections, which promotes growth through self-awareness.

The anticipation and excitement of the new course was worth the wait! It was received enthusiastically by volunteers and staff alike, with feedback including:

- "I enjoyed the hands-on exercises and activities, and gaining tools to use in the future."

- "I loved learning new skills and ways of thinking."

The course is extremely interactive and practical, giving members the opportunity to practice their engagement skills and grow their confidence.

As a region, we are committed to the continual delivery of this course and encouraging our members to get involved. Through effective engagement, our members will continue to increase community preparedness and resilience for emergencies, and ultimately provide safer communities together. ■

returning the uninjured pet to her relieved family.

This heart-warming story was shared on the VICSES Portland Unit Facebook page the next day, and immediately began to gain community interest far greater than they had imagined!

Reaching over 65,500 people, with more than 800 post likes, 250 post shares, and almost the same again on the VICSES state Facebook page, the post had gone viral! The shared content also received almost 300 comments, showing overwhelming support for the unit's service to the community.

"It's been an amazing response from the community, and it's great to be able to share a good news story with people," said Portland Unit Controller Scott McFarlane.

The story has also been featured on ABC radio, across TV on both Channel 7 and Channel 10 news, and in several newspapers.

The immense and unexpected success of this story highlights the importance of sharing VICSES achievements with the community, and how effective social media can be in spreading news and information! ■



VICSES volunteer receives community youth award

By Melanie Gill, Community Resilience Coordinator, South West Region

Congratulations are in order for VICSES Lorne Unit volunteer James Staley, on being a recipient of the Surf Coast Shire Council Youth Awards.

Celebrations were held at the Wurdai Baierr Stadium in Torquay on 26 June, recognising young people for their contributions and achievements across four categories: Arts, community, environment, and sport.

James was announced as a joint winner of the community award for his dedication and commitment as a VICSES volunteer. Since commencing at the Lorne Unit in 2018, James has attended over 100 requests for assistance.

Not having a drivers' license doesn't hold James back from helping his community, as he regularly rides his pushbike to the unit to respond to emergencies!

While being shocked at receiving the award and very grateful, James also thanks VICSES for what the organisation has done for him.

"Because I have a disability and can't read and write, getting a job has been really hard. But since joining VICSES I have a purpose, and that purpose is to help people."

Congratulations James on this well-earned recognition! ■



OPERATIONAL UPDATES

ESTA and VICSES fleet showcase day

By Aaron White, Operations Officer – Operational Communications, VHO

As part of our continued #weworkasone effort with partner agencies, VICSES recently took the opportunity visit the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA) at their Williams Landing location in Melbourne, to showcase our VICSES resources with ESTA staff - some who may have never seen our resources before.

Operation Vehicle, Lighting Plant and Rescue Boat to name a few.

ESTA staff also had the ability to watch a road crash rescue (RCR) display, showcasing the tools and techniques used by our RCR trained members out in the field. In addition, the demonstration allowed members from other VICSES units that do not have RCR capabilities to learn a little bit more from our RCR trained members.

This showcase not only provided ESTA and VICSES with the opportunity to come together, but also allowed for our own members to come together to share ideas and learnings with fellow members that had not seen some of our available resources, or had the opportunity to explore and learn more.

This showcase was the first of its kind for ESTA, and was well received by their team.

These types of events just don't happen overnight, and take some time and commitment to organise. I would like to thank all of our members who assisted in getting this day off the ground, and look forward to conducting a day like this again in the near future,



While VICSES dispatchers from ESTA

may receive a request to deploy specific resources or capabilities, this showcase day provided the opportunity for them to get some hands-on experience and knowledge of these resources.

With the assistance of our volunteers from North West, South West and Central Regions, we were able to bring in a Mobile Command Vehicle, Field



to allow for ESTA staff who were unable to attend the day to have the chance to come along and see what VICSES has to offer the community.

The Operational Communications team has also been working with ESTA to begin having members visit the new ESTA facility at Williams Landing, so keep an eye out on the Hub for when these events will commence. ■



More information

If you would like to view and share more info on our showcase day with ESTA, you can download a video of the showcase to share on your unit social media pages via our VICSES Vimeo at www.vimeo.com/vicses.

REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE

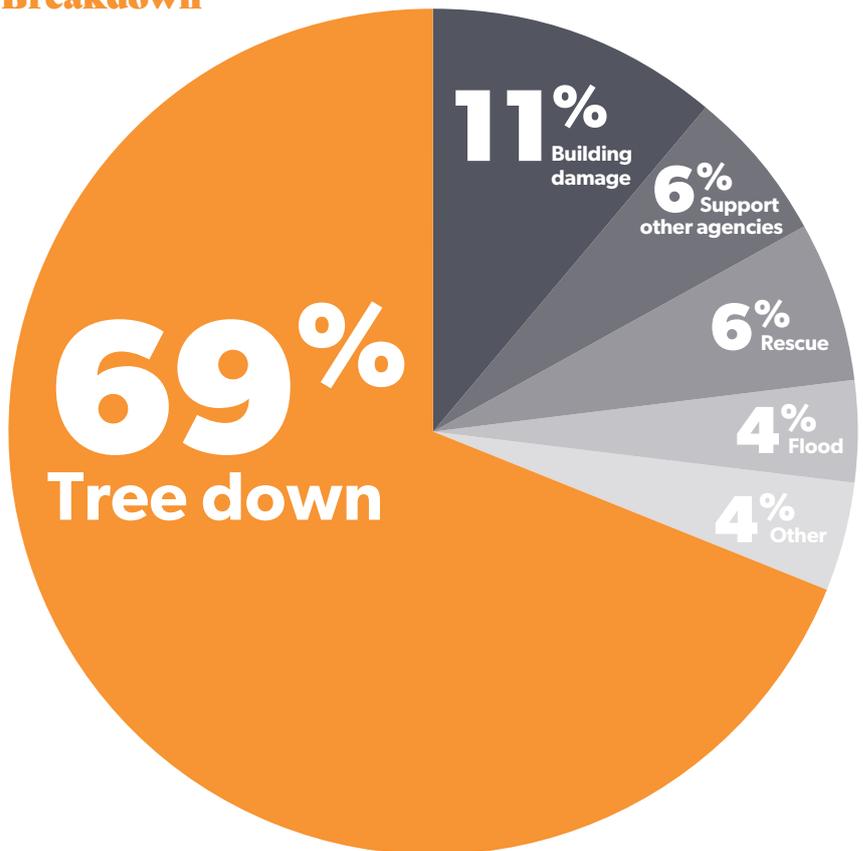
1 April - 30 June

Total

13,039



Breakdown



PROJECTS – WHAT'S NEW

Vehicle operator induction

By Paul Wallworth, Acting Manager People and Organisation Development, VHO

Incidents involving vehicles is a significant trend within SafeGate, and has the potential to cause serious injury to members and damage to VICSES property.

In response, VICSES has managed the development of a vehicle operator induction program, which is nearing the pilot stage. The development began with a volunteer working group, who identified the need for a consistent approach to confirming members

are ready to drive VICSES vehicles and understand operational and maintenance checks.

The training will consist of four online modules completed in the Training Portal, and then a practical session. During the session, members will be taken through

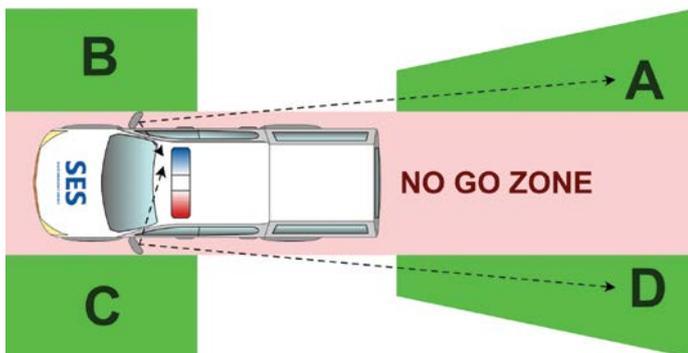


practical stands on vehicle checks, movement of vehicles including on roads, and use of guides to assist the driver to safely control movement of the vehicle.

When confirmed through the pilot and released, the program will be a requirement to be completed by all members (volunteers and staff) who will drive a VICSES vehicle.

Within the role and training pathway, it will be offered after members have completed their online VICSES induction.

A separate module on the use of trailers and towing techniques will also be piloted for release. Plans for piloting are being finalised, subject to easing of COVID-19 restrictions. ■



Maintain Safety at Storm and Flood Operations course

By Nicole Ralph, Learning and Development Resource Writer, VHO

Earlier this year, the Learning and Development team released a 'Maintain Safety at Storm and Flood Operations' course.

Launch of new VICSES website

By David Murphy, Media Officer, VHO

In July we officially launched our brand new VICSES website!

In an effort to roll-out a new modern look and feel, the new site now utilises more visually engaging graphics and images and less text, with an emphasis on removing jargon for the general public.

The content about becoming a volunteer, where to find emergency information, and how to plan and prepare for emergencies is now easier to navigate to on the homepage, making it clearer for the community to access.

Other significant updates include a new flood guide search box, where entering your suburb name or postcode will locate your local flood guide and flood information, along with an improved design of

the flood guide pages to ensure the content is accessible and quick to find.

Information in other languages has also been redesigned to make it easier for people of non-English backgrounds to quickly find emergency information and advice.

The website also now sits on a new platform, so that the pages scale when accessed from a mobile device. Being on the latest platform means edits can be made to the homepage instantly, which is fantastic in an emergency.

"We were able to follow what our users were interested in by using information from website visits," says Scott Morgan, Digital Content Officer for VICSES.

The program is designed for VICSES members, as well as support agencies (and in some instances contractors), who are required to perform physical and incident management activities at storm and flood operations.

The training provides the following key areas:

- Hazard awareness and the knowledge to safely undertake

roles at storm and flood operation.

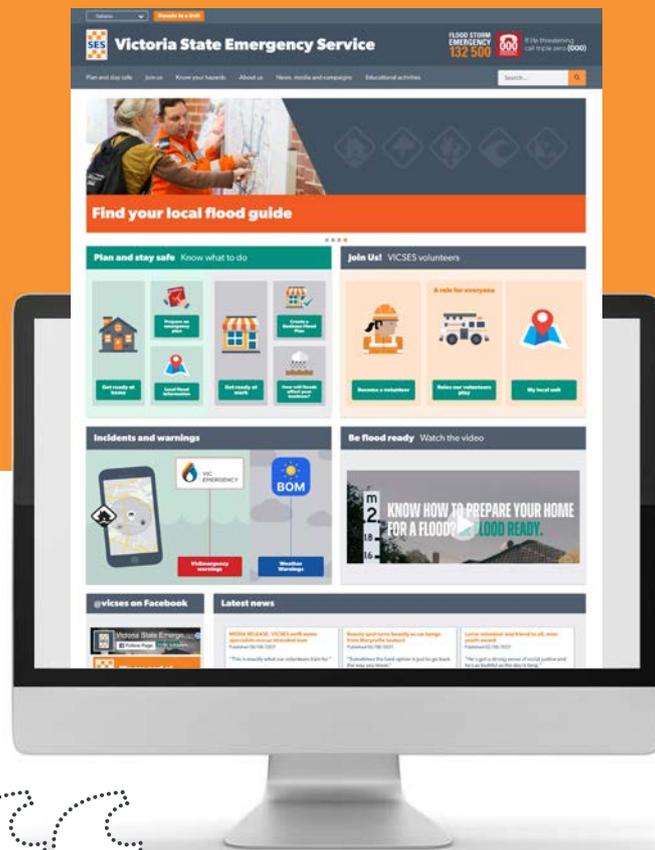
- An overview of the reporting and control structures during storm and flood operations.
- Details of weather classifications used by the Bureau of Meteorology.
- A description of activities that can be undertaken by support agencies and VICSES during storm and flood operations.

The course has been highly spoken of by members and operational staff. VICSES Chief Officer Operations Tim Wiebusch praised the importance of the program and its content at a briefing early this year.

With recent severe weather, we have all been reminded of the importance safety at storm and flood events.



The course is available to all members via the VICSES Training Portal. ■



After we looked at those site analytics, we knew where to focus our attention."

We hope you enjoy our new website and the updated changes. ■



More information

If you have any feedback or would like to report any issues, please contact Scott Morgan at scott.morgan@ses.vic.gov.au

WELLBEING, HEALTH & SAFETY

Meet the WHS team!



**NICOLE
GOODRIDGE**



**STEWART
RIDDEL**



**MARK
AMOS**

Our safety experts as part the VICSES Wellbeing, Health and Safety (WHS) team are always hard at work supporting our members as they assist the community.

It's not all SOP's and risk assessments - creating a safe working environment is a dynamic process, with constantly shifting goal posts. To find out a little more, meet Stewart, Mark, and Nicole from the WHS team!

Hi all! Can you tell us a bit about your role at VICSES?

Stewart Riddel: Many people ask that! My role is as a WHS Advisor, and my main focus is to provide WHS support, guidance and advice to all members.

Nicole Goodridge: My role is as a WHS Officer – or as some people call me, the 'SafeGate guru'! Some of my day-to-day tasks include providing guidance and support to members for our SafeGate incident/hazard

management system, managing our contractor management online system (LinkSafe), and providing administrative assistance to my WHS team.

Mark Amos: Like Stewart, I am also employed as a WHS Advisor. My portfolio includes both Central and East Regions.

Why is safety important to you?

NG: Safety is important as it promotes a safe working environment, allowing our members to feel comfortable, supported, and able to perform to the best of their ability.

MA: It's so important to provide and maintain a safe workplace, so I enjoy talking to people about how

safety can be embedded into the tasks they perform.

What's your best piece of safety advice?

SR: 'Stop, think and consider' – most situations we find ourselves in can be improved if we follow this piece of advice.

MA: 'Change for the better' - this promotes continuous improvement, especially in regard to safety and our overall wellbeing.

On to a more personal subject... what sporting team do you follow?

SR: We don't play in blue and we don't play in green, we are Glasgow's greatest football team...the MIGHTY Partick Thistle Football Club!

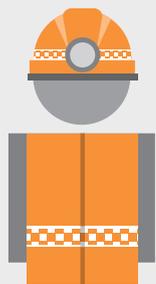
NG: Sport has been a major part of my life, playing representative and state basketball from the age of 5! I started my basketball journey with the Melbourne Bulleen Boomers and went on to represent Victoria at the State Championships, and was eventually signed to the Bulleen Boomers WNBL team and played alongside some of the greats, including Michelle Timms. I later made the move to play as part of the Bendigo Braves, and came back to Melbourne to play with the Nunawading Spectres. But basketball aside... in AFL, I follow the mighty Swans!

MA: I have been a member of Melbourne Storm since 2007, but have been following them for long before that. In the AFL, I follow the mighty Blues – go Carlton! ■



Where can you find the team?

We work closely with Health and Safety representatives across our regional offices, as well as Health and Safety unit delegates at regular safety committee meetings and catch ups. We are always open to hearing your ideas, concerns or requests. You can contact us at health&safety@ses.vic.gov.au



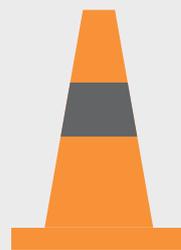
Workplace inspections

July 2019 –
June 2020

200

July 2020 –
June 2021

226



Injuries

July 2019 –
June 2020

104

July 2020 –
June 2021

130

East Region bushfire wellbeing support

By Paul Fitzgerald, Psychologist, VHO

During the 2019-20 Victorian Bushfires, VICSES members played a significant role in a very challenging fire season.

As a result, there has been impacts on the health and wellbeing of those members who have worked and lived within these areas impacted by fire.

Throughout the first quarter of 2021, onsite support was provided by the VICSES Mental Health and Wellbeing team to volunteers and staff throughout the bushfire affected East Gippsland region. I (Paul Fitzgerald, VICSES Psychologist), visited

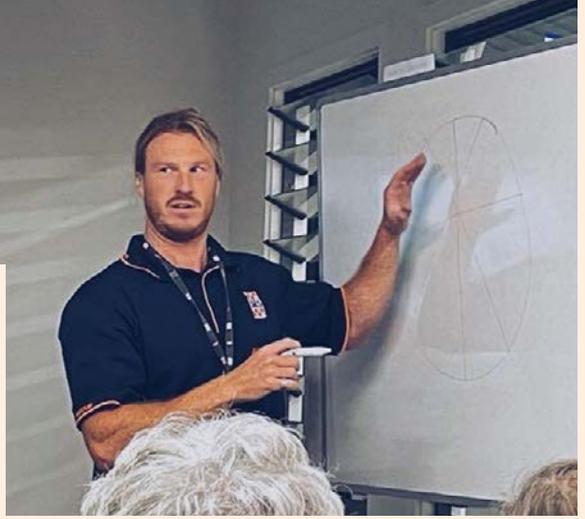
units and offices across the region including Bairnsdale, Moe, Muchan, Bruthen, Tambo Valley, Orbost, Cann River and Mallacoota.

Workshops were delivered at each unit and office on stress management, to support members to identify the early signs of burnout in themselves and others. A new one-on-one resilience building and wellbeing screening pilot program was also hosted for members, which was originally developed by Ambulance

Victoria. It is hoped that we will be able to scale this program across our entire organisation, which will enable intervention of psychological injury in the important early stages.

A multi-agency 'Emergency Services Games' community day has been scheduled for November 2021 in Mallacoota, which will see first responders from the surrounding areas come together as a community as the rebuild continues throughout the region.

This is just one of the many great health and wellbeing initiatives happening across the state. Thanks for having me East Region! ■



Latest MindFit Podcast

Check out our latest edition of the VICSES MindFit podcast with Hugh van Cuylenburg, founder of the Resilience Project. Learn all about the three simple principles for building resilience. Subscribe now on Spotify. ■



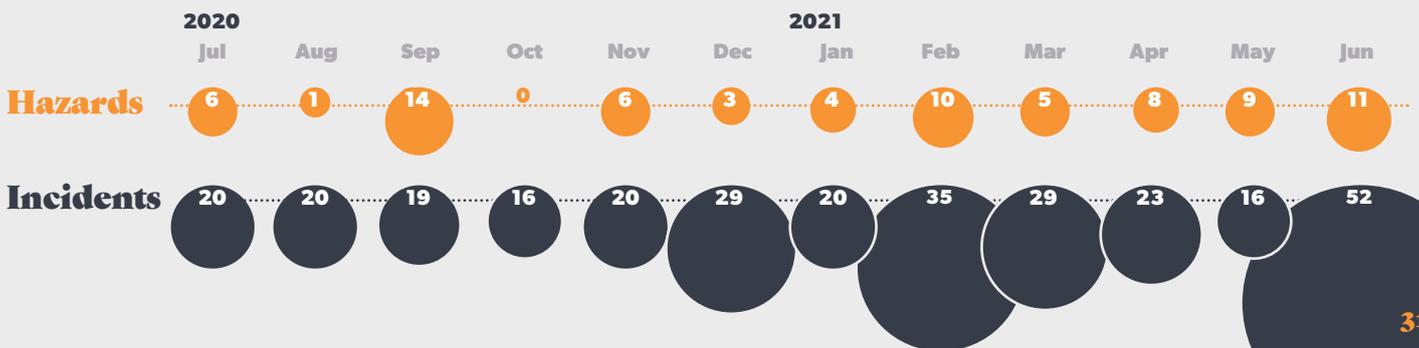
"When you are worrying about something you can't control that does make you very anxious... the only thing we ever have control over in our life is what is happening now in this very moment."

Our guest

Hugh van Cuylenburg
The Resilience Project



YEAR AT A GLANCE





**COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT**

CEF Course facilitator training for our CRCs



By Hannah Macdougall, Senior Advisor Community Programs and Campaigns

It wasn't a moment too soon that Community Resilience Coordinators (CRCs) from across our regions were able to get together for training as part of the Community Engagement Facilitator (CEF) course.

The course was held at VEMI in Mt Macedon just before Lockdown 5. The CRC's spent two days receiving guidance and mentoring on how to deliver the new CEF course in their own regions.

Boutique consultancy agency Liminal by Design assisted in co-facilitation for the training, providing valuable and knowledgeable input. The agency,

who works with organisations during times of change for purposeful choices, was the successful team chosen to deliver the 'Safer Together' training held a few years ago by the Country Fire Authority – a training program which the CEF course has drawn heavily from.

The CEF course aligns with the VICSES Community Resilience Strategy Renewal 2019-22

and VICSES Strategic Plan 2018-22. Importantly, the program is based on internal and external stakeholder research, which identified that the key requirements of our CEFs was 'the skills and confidence' to engage with communities. PowerPoint usage is minimal, and instead participants are challenged to engage during discussions, reflections, and activities using the

power of movement, room space, and neuroscience!

All CRC's walked away from the training with an increased confidence to deliver the course, with comments including:

"The last few days were really fantastic – thank you! It makes such a difference to be able to see and do and contribute as a team. I am excited to get started!"

"I loved being involved in such a brilliant course, and look forward to helping deliver the program."

The CEF course will be delivered across regions over the second half of the year, subject to COVID-19 guidelines and restrictions. We thank you all for your patience as we manage our way through lockdowns. ■

**COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT
COLLATERAL:**

Pavement signs and posters

By Ciara Palmer, Event and Project Support Officer, VHO

Some of our units have now received their pavement signs, which can be used with poster inserts for various community engagement programs. The remaining signs and all posters will be dispatched as COVID-19 restrictions permit. Posters for the pavement signs include key messages focused on:

- **15 to float:** Augmented reality experience focusing on never driving on flooded roads. It takes just 15cm of water to float a small car - that's the size of an average pen!
- **Bag it, block it, lift it and leave:** Get your sandbags ready, block your toilets and your drains, lift your valuables up high and leave as soon as possible.
- **Join us!** Recruiting now.
- **Local Flood Guides:** Do you know your flood risk?
- **VicEmergency app:** Download the VicEmergency app and set up a watch zone for you home or work.

The posters include QR codes that take community members to the VICSES website, and enable data and evaluation of our community engagement programs to occur. The posters hit the mark with alignment to our style guide, colourful nature, and catchy design. ■

Bag it, block it, lift it and leave campaign

By Hannah Macdougall, Senior Advisor, Community Programs and Campaigns

Bag it, block it, lift it and leave (BBL) has now gone state-wide, with a mass media campaign approved by the government.

The state-wide BBL campaign builds upon previous work by including the simple, yet striking and familiar, flood marker in various settings around the home. Animations for regional and metro Melbourne have been created, as well as a series of short live films, members series guide, posters, and social tiles to name a few!

During the month of June, the BBL campaign had nearly 4 million impressions on Facebook for BBL imagery, and 12.7 million impressions for our BBL video. Excitingly, the campaign had high engagement with targeted multicultural communities, including Arabic, Vietnamese, Turkish and Chinese communities. The campaign

also featured metro and regional radio adds.

The BBL campaign was the result of many collaborations between community, state government, creative agencies, experts in translations and multicultural communities, and media communication agencies.

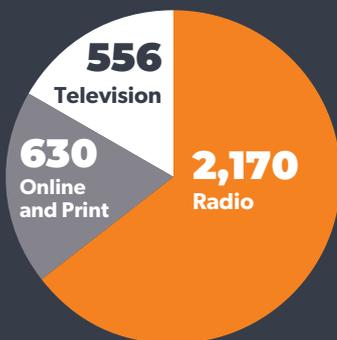
The assets created through the campaign include the simple calls to action of '**bag it** – get your sandbags ready', '**block** your toilets and your drains', '**lift** your valuables up high', and '**leave** as soon as possible'. These calls to action within the online videos, social media posts, and audio files will help to contribute to campaigns for VICSES over the coming years. The assets are also available for our members to use, and can be found on the Hub under **My State > Community > Community Engagement Resources.** ■



MEDIA

1 April -
30 June 2021

Mentions of VICSES in the news:



Social media highlights:

FACEBOOK



Reach:
206,329

Post clicks:
13,352

Reactions, comments and shares:
16,328

9 June: VICSES receives over 1,800 requests for assistance in 24 hours.

TWITTER



Impressions:
142,051

Total engagements:
1,336

Likes, retweets and clicks:
125

9 June: Severe weather on the way again for parts of Victoria.

LINKEDIN



Impressions:
7,051

Clicks:
626

Reactions, comments and shares:
203

13 April: Deployments to Western Australia to support Cyclone Seroja.

INSTAGRAM



Impressions: **3,831** **Reach:** **3,154**

Comments, likes and saves:
327

19 June: Six-year-old Judd meets his heroes from Essendon Unit.

Campaigns and events:

- VICSES Pride March.
- *Wear Orange Wednesday*.
- National Volunteer Week.
- *Thank a First Responder Day*.

Media releases:

- Women in rescue showcase their skills.
- Thanking our VICSES volunteers for WOW Day 2021.
- Lifesaving equipment donated to VICSES units.
- VICSES helping those in need during circuit breaker lockdown.
- Future VICSES volunteer meets his idols.
- VICSES urges Victorians to stay safe as restrictions ease.
- Gippsland is open for business.

Ministerial events:

- Nil

MEDIA LIAISON OFFICER SPOTLIGHT

Jarrold Bell, Sunbury Unit

Hi Jarrold! Can you tell us how you first decided to become involved as a Media Liaison Officer (MLO)?

I'll be honest, it was less a decision and more of a strong suggestion from my units management team! I was seen as a pretty outgoing member and someone who wasn't afraid to speak to people. I also saw an opportunity for our unit to develop our social media presence and get our Facebook up and running. I've been our units Section Leader for media now for almost 8 years.

What do you enjoy the most about the role?

A good MLO can be one of a unit's greatest assets. We have amazing members who do inspirational things every day, and we need to get these amazing stories out there for the world to see! All too often we see other agencies getting more coverage or media attention, and one thing I have learned is that this won't change unless an effective MLO is out there in the field, or working behind the scenes to either tell our story or to support others.

Are there any challenges that you've faced as an MLO during an emergency event?

I'll be honest, the biggest challenge having MLOs considered as part of operational staffing. I would love to see volunteer MLOs deployed as part of interstate and major deployments, to help send stories of our good work home. We can't rely on others to sell our stories, and we need to have the confidence to be out there pushing the work we are doing.

What role do you think the media plays for our units and volunteers?

If people don't know about you or the work you do, then you aren't on people's radar - it's that simple. Using both traditional media and social media can be one of the best tools in your toolbox. Like other units, our unit is quite hidden in terms of its location. We don't have much natural 'visibility', so my mission as MLO is to earn our visibility through PR activities, media engagements, and our social media presence.

What would you say to other VICSES members considering becoming a MLO?

We need more MLOs! It's a great way to boost your unit's community profile, and to develop local relationships and build personal confidence. I'm always happy to chat, so if you are interested in the role or have any questions, please feel free to get in touch on jarrold.bell@members.ses.vic.gov.au ■

INFORMATION SERVICES (IS)

Let's talk support



The IS support team currently operates a service desk for all staff and volunteers from 8am to 5pm on weekdays, excluding holidays.

We know that many of our members would like to see support extended to be available in those hours after 5pm. What we don't know is what this service should look like in terms of the number of people involved, access, types of calls, and more.

To help us test out extended support hours, we are excited to announce that the IS team will be conducting a pilot to provide IS support for volunteers and report feedback.

The service desk pilot will run from mid-September to mid-November 2021, with operating hours extended

from 8am to 9:30pm, Monday to Thursday.

The same method of contact for the service desk via phone and email will still be made available for the pilot, in addition to a Webex chat forum.

Most importantly, we would like to engage volunteers with the required skills to operate the service desk pilot. This will involve two weeks of training prior to the beginning of the pilot.

An online expression of interest form has been released, and thank you to all of our volunteers who have jumped on board to participate in this much needed project. ■

Meet the IS team:



PRANAYA ERPINA

Hi Pranaya! Can you tell us a bit about your role as an IT Support Officer with VICSES?

As an IT Support Officer I am responsible for volunteer and staff IT access, including providing support with hardware and software issues. I'm glad to part of an amazing team of people!

What do you enjoy the most about working as part of the IT sector?

Working as part of the IT sector, I've been given the opportunity to stop, observe, and evolve. Everyone shares different visions within the sector, and everyone has different ways of dealing with IT issues. A single problem can have many solutions, and the space is always continually evolving. Working within the IT sector has also given me a great degree of control and freedom.

Are there any challenges that you've faced in your role during recent severe weather events, or COVID-19 restrictions?

Two days into joining VICSES, Victoria was set to go into lockdown. As a new member, I still needed to be across all of the applications. With the support of my amazing team, I was able to be across all of the new information and start supporting our members.

Outside of VICSES, how do you like to enjoy your spare time?

I really enjoy chatting with my mum, and I love to go for drives with my cousins. ■



Your unit PC fleet

If you're not already across the communications from our recent Windows Refresh Project, you may have missed the offer to purchase a Dell laptop and peripheral devices for your unit.

The devices will be connected to the VICSES network, and will be supported by our IS team, including security and system updates. ■

*** More information**

If you'd like to take advantage of this offer for your unit, check the Hub under **My State > Information Services > Technology Deals.**



Safer Communities - Together

