

WINTER 2025

Community Matters

VICSES

EDITION 31

PAGE 04
(cover photo)

WOMEN IN RESCUE

GOES FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

**Wear Orange
Wednesday 2025**

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**Celebrating
50 years of VICSES**

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Bangholme event.



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MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES

Community Matters winter edition, 2025

As we head into the coldest months of the year, I'm reminded of the many ways our Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) volunteers make a difference to the lives of people across the state – dedicating their time, energy and skills to protect Victorians every day of the year, and in all kinds of weather.

It was a privilege to help celebrate VICSES' incredible 50-year milestone at the gala event in March. This was a wonderful opportunity to reflect on VICSES' rich history of service to the Victorian community, and to recognise the integral support our volunteers continue to provide to thousands of people in need each year.

I was also delighted to join the festivities for Wear Orange Wednesday – or WOW Day – on 21 May. VICSES volunteers show up for their local communities in times of need, often during the worst days of people's lives, and WOW Day is an opportunity to show our appreciation for their remarkable dedication and resilience.

Over the past 12 months, VICSES volunteers have responded to

more than 35,000 requests for assistance, supporting Victorians through severe flooding and storms, rescues, and so much more.

It's vital we continue to support our volunteers to carry out this work – particularly as we see an increase in the frequency and severity of natural disasters, including floods, storms, and fire.

The new Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, which will replace the Fire Services Property Levy from 1 July 2025, will ensure emergency service volunteers and agencies have the funding, modern equipment and resources they need to continue to keep our communities safe and help them recover from major weather emergencies.

The new Fund provides increased funding certainty for a wider range of emergency service organisations, including the critical work of VICSES. This will help ensure VICSES units are equipped to meet the ongoing needs of their local communities.

I want to thank each and every one of our VICSES volunteers for your unwavering dedication, no matter what the weather. The work you do makes a real difference, and your deep commitment and compassion does not go unnoticed.

Stay warm and take care this winter.

Vicki Ward
Minister for
Emergency Services
Minister for Natural
Disaster Recovery



Welcome

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

It's been an exciting time to join VICSES as Chief Executive Officer, with so many fantastic initiatives and events taking place across the state.

On 21 May we celebrated Wear Orange Wednesday – a national day of thanks for our incredible SES volunteers. Our volunteers are the backbone of our organisation, dedicating their lives to the safety of others during some of our most challenging times. I was overwhelmed to see the support from our partner agencies, community members, and across state and local media. To our volunteers - I cannot thank you enough for your invaluable contributions in keeping our communities safe. You can read more about our WOW Day celebrations on page 6.

Secondly, I would like to thank all those who were involved in this year's spectacular Women in Rescue (WIR) event in early March. WIR provides a fantastic opportunity for women and gender diverse members to come together to build on rescue skills and leadership capabilities in a supportive environment. 2025 marked our biggest year yet, with a record number of participants attending seven locations across the state. You can read more on page 4.

I'd also like to acknowledge our volunteers who supported 16 of the more than 30 Driver

Reviver sites open over the Easter long weekend, providing an opportunity for drivers to stop, rest and revive to help prevent fatigue related road incidents. As Australia's largest road crash rescue provider, our volunteers understand the first-hand impacts that road trauma has on our communities, so it's fantastic that we can support the Driver Reviver program to help reduce the road toll. Read more on page 11.

Other significant events that our volunteers have recently been involved in include the Avalon Australian International Airshow and the Seymour Alternative Farming Expo, providing the opportunity to better connect with our communities about who we are, and what we do and their important preparedness actions. You can read more about these events on pages 28 and 29 respectively.

As I settle into my role at VICSES, I am grateful for the opportunity to meet many of our dedicated volunteers and staff across Victoria, and I look forward to meeting with more of our members in the coming months.

I hope you enjoy this edition of *Community Matters* and stay safe.

Kind regards,
Robert Purcell
CEO Victoria State
Emergency Service

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

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GENERAL
NEWS

VICSES' Women
in Rescue goes
from strength
to strength

By Dharni Giri, Senior Media Advisor, VHO

Over 270 female and gender diverse volunteers from VICSES united in March, for seven simultaneous events across the state as part of the ever-expanding Women in Rescue (WIR) initiative.

Now in its eighth year, WIR was originally founded in 2018 by female volunteers for female volunteers, and has grown significantly, with this year marking its largest event yet with over 270 volunteers attending events across seven locations.

WIR is a hands-on training event designed to empower women in emergency operations. Participants gain experience using tools and equipment, refine their rescue skills, build confidence, and collaborate in a supportive environment.

The event promotes gender diversity within VICSES while encouraging recruitment and retention of female volunteers. Currently, women make up nearly 34% (1,689 out of 5,002) of VICSES' volunteer base, and the organisation aims to increase that number to better reflect the communities it serves.

The focus of the day was practical, skills-based training, with exercises covering a wide range of emergency rescue response scenarios.

This event follows a demanding 2024, where VICSES volunteers received a yearly total

of 44,380 Requests for Assistance across the state on the back of a number of storms and road rescues.

VICSES takes pride in the dedication and expertise of its female and gender diverse volunteers, who play a vital role in emergency response and community safety. ■



Women in Rescue success
recognised with award

By Lauren Castle, Corporate
Communications Advisor, VHO

At the Emergency Services Foundation's International Women's Day Diversity and Inclusion Awards, the team behind our annual Women in Rescue event were presented with the 'Women's Equality Initiative' award for promoting the equality of women in an emergency service workplace. The judging panel for this award included Ro Allen (Victoria's Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner) and Niki Vincent (Commissioner for Gender Equality in the Public Sector)

Congratulations to the Women in Rescue team on this incredible and well-deserved recognition! ■



VICSES honoured
with the Fleet
Innovation Award

By Lynette Conner, Assets Manager, State Fleet Centre

VICSES recently attended the Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia Fleet Conference where we were honoured with the Fleet Innovation Award.

This award recognises the contemporary Rescue Truck Quality Assurance Framework developed to support the design and development process of our fleet. The Next Generation Heavy Rescue Truck prototype was the vehicle tested using this methodology, serving as proof of concept for the framework's effectiveness.

Our framework underpins the entire design process - from stakeholder engagement, theoretical finite element analysis and ergonomic assessment to building a prototype for durability testing. It also incorporates collaboration with third-party experts to validate and refine the final design. The past three years have been challenging, but a key outcome has been the

development of this framework, which now sets the standard for how we design and develop our fleet into the future. This recognition highlights VICSES' commitment to innovation and excellence in fleet development, ensuring we continue to meet the evolving needs of our volunteers.

In an article published by Fleet Auto News on 25 March 2025 it was stated that "The judges commended VICSES for refusing to simply repeat past practices. Instead, they took the opportunity to start from scratch, design with the end user in mind, and deliver a vehicle that sets new standards for safety, functionality, and innovation." While this recognition is truly rewarding, we remain committed to continuous improvement and striving for even greater success. ■



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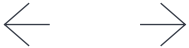
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Wear Orange Wednesday 2025 makes a splash

By Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO

On Wednesday 21 May we joined with our partners and community to celebrate Wear Orange Wednesday (WOW Day) 2025, the annual day to say thank you to the incredible SES volunteers in Victoria and across the nation. This year’s WOW Day was extra special off the back of our 50 Years of VICSES celebrations in March.

In the spirit of National Volunteer Week which began on Monday 19 May, we started our celebrations with the state WOW Day media launch held at the VICSES Malvern Unit. At the launch, motorcyclist Jess was reunited with VICSES Chelsea Unit volunteers Alex and Tammy, who assisted her during a serious road incident which they encountered

while returning from a late-night job. The Chelsea Unit volunteers sprung into action when they saw a damaged motorcycle on the road by blocking traffic, alerting other emergency services, and providing support to Jess until paramedics arrived. Just like this crew, SES volunteers go out of their way to provide crucial assistance to community members, every day.



At the media launch, VICSES Malvern Unit volunteer Danielle spoke with Channel 9 about WOW Day and the vital role VICSES volunteers play not only during storm and flood operations, but in assisting our partner agencies such as Ambulance Victoria and Victoria Police. On WOW Day, VICSES Nillumbik Unit volunteer Mel River was

interviewed on the national ABC TV News Breakfast show about the crucial role VICSES volunteers play in their communities. Weather presenters Jayde Cotic (10 NEWS) and Jane Bunn (7 NEWS) also held live crosses with our volunteers as part of state bulletins. As part of our WOW Day pet photo ‘comPETition,’ we encouraged volunteers to submit photos of



their pets dressed up in a ‘fur-bulous’ orange outfit. With the onset of cooler weather, VICSES volunteers across the state were glad to enjoy a free hot drink from McDonald’s® as a thank you for their service.

WOW Day banners and billboards helped paint the state orange in both metro and regional locations, including over 110 roadside billboards, thanks to AAMI.

Community members and our partners got on board by wearing a splash of orange, hosting WOW Day themed events, and sharing messages of thanks on social media using the hashtag #ThankYouSES.

Thank you to everyone who helped make WOW Day 2025 one to remember, and of course to our incredible VICSES volunteers for their hard work and dedication to keeping others safe. You truly are the backbone of your communities, and we cannot thank you enough for all that you do. ■



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50 Years of VICSES Gala

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO

Around 450 past and present VICSES members and guests gathered in March to celebrate 50 Years of VICSES.

Attendees included VICSES life members, Emergency Service Medal recipients, and representatives from many of our current volunteer units across the state.

Incredibly, 13 of the 15 volunteers who have been cornerstones of their communities throughout the organisation’s entire 50-year journey were in attendance, having volunteered with Civil Defence and other community emergency response initiatives before being amalgamated under the VICSES banner from March 1975.

Brett Neve (Frankston), Cliff Tan (Colac), Colin Matheson (Lilydale), David Fitzroy and Peter

Weeks (Alexandra), Denis Brain (Footscray), Gerard Mahoney (Mansfield), Graeme and Leigh Edwards (Stawell), Ian Sinclair (Beechworth), John Cook (Tambo Valley), Keith Barns and Neville Lynch (Euroa), Stan Hendy (Loddon Mallee) and Wendy Witty (Swan Hill) were each recognised as VICSES Golden Jubilee Foundation Members as part of the festivities.

Robert Purcell, VICSES Chief Executive Officer said “The Gala was a fantastic opportunity to engage with and learn from VICSES volunteers from across the state who have played a vital role in keeping their communities safe for over 50 years. Our volunteers don’t turn out to emergencies

expecting to receive recognition as a result, however, it’s important as an organisation we celebrate and honour those members who have been pillars of our service and who have helped VICSES grow into a trusted and respected emergency response provider.”

Historical memorabilia dating back to VICSES’ predecessor, the Civil Defence Organisation, was on display throughout the evening, as were a number of

historical vehicles including a 1967 International C1600 belonging to VICSES Cann River Unit, and a 1960 International P Van belonging to the then Footscray branch of Civil Defence.

A series of panel discussions involving current and former volunteers, executive members and the Acting Emergency Management Commissioner Tim Wiebusch explored VICSES’ transition from Civil

Defence, its consolidation and growth as a respected emergency service and recent advancements in the service’s capacity as an emergency response agency.

Other guests, including Minister for Emergency Services The Hon. Vicki Ward, VICSES Chief Executive Officer Robert Purcell and Controller of the brand-new VICSES Officer Unit, Jess Rice, cast an eye to the future of VICSES’ involvement in Victorian communities.

Popular meteorologist, television presenter and VICSES supporter Jane Bunn capped the evening by regaling the crowd with her observations as a broadcaster of the impact of severe weather in Victoria and the key role VICSES volunteers play in keeping communities safe.

A big thank you to everyone who attended and made this fantastic event possible. ■



Reflecting on my leadership journey across 47 years at VICSES

By Brian McMannis, Deputy Controller Facilities,
VICSES Frankston/Skye Units



Brian McMannis

I started my VICSES career in 1978.

I was coming home from work late at night travelling along a dirt road in rainy and windy conditions in Frankston when I came across people warning motorists that the road was flooded and to be careful. It was cold and raining heavily. I continued home and told my then wife about these people standing in the rain warning people about the danger. I felt sorry for them and decided to take them a thermos of hot coffee. Upon my return, I conversed with them for a while, and they were very thankful for the coffee. They told me they were volunteers from the VICSES Frankston Unit. While I was there with them, their then-positioned Rescue Officer arrived to pick them up and take them back to their base. He said to me “Brian, why don’t you come down to our base in Frankston one Monday night to see what we are all about.”

And as they say in the classics, “the rest is history”. I joined up as a VICSES volunteer and 47 years later I’m still part of this great organisation.

After I joined, I held different positions within the Frankston Unit and in 1986 I applied for the position of Unit Controller. The role was advertised in the local newspaper, and I had to front a panel made up of Frankston Councillors, local senior police, and VICSES representatives. My application was successful,

and this started my journey as a Unit Controller for the next 28 years. After retiring as Unit Controller in 2014 I remained part of the management team until 2020, when I was asked to take on the role of Unit Controller again. This appointment lasted for four years, and I then handed the reigns over to Frankston’s first ever female Unit Controller, Brooke Bird, in 2024. I am currently still part of the Frankston Unit Management Team.

2024 also saw me taking on the role of the Inaugural Unit Controller at the brand-new VICSES Cranbourne Unit. I was asked to go there and help get it up and running. It was certainly an experience starting a unit from scratch!

I consider myself to be a people person and I think that this is part of the reason why I had lasted so long as a Unit Controller. I’m also adaptable to change. A lot of things have evolved over the years with vehicles, uniforms, equipment, training, attitudes, and safety. Originally, we had no flashing lights on our vehicles, then went to amber lights, then red and blues. We started off with second hand vehicles that were all makes and models. The uniforms have been upgraded with better quality materials, enhancing our safety. Equipment has improved over the years making our job somewhat easier. Training has

also improved, continuing training on the jobs that make up what the VICSES is about. In addition, we have strengthened our relationships with our sector partners and other emergency service organisations have become more confident in what we do.

Some of the most memorable operations I’ve been part of have included supporting fire response during Ash Wednesday (1983) and later, Black Saturday (2009). Similarly, the Tynong North and Frankston murders (1980-1981) and the Sarah MacDiarmid disappearance (1990) were devastating events which I’ll never forget.

I have been lucky enough to have received some acknowledgement awards during my time. The ones that stand out to me are the Emergency Service Medal and the VICSES Life Member Medal. This recognition is not what you join for, but it’s a thank you for what you have done in the service which is always appreciated.

What I’ve learnt over the years about effective leadership is that to be a good Unit Controller you need to have confidence, the ability to listen, be able to adapt to change, give and receive respect, lead by example, and make sure that all members under your leadership follow our VICSES Values. ■

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VICSES Glen Eira Unit

VICSES members recognise 110th ANZAC Day

By Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO

On 25 April, VICSES volunteers and staff from across the state attended events to recognise the 110th ANZAC Day anniversary. Events included the ANZAC Day Dawn Service, ANZAC March, in addition to locally held commemorative services. VICSES members joined together with their communities to reflect and remember all the courageous people who have fought for our freedom. Lest we forget. ■



VICSES Hastings Unit



VICSES Sunbury Unit



VICSES Ballarat Unit

Driver Reviver returns to keep motorists safe

By Dharni Giri, Senior Media Advisor, VHO

VICSES volunteers encouraged motorists to break up their travels at Driver Reviver or Transport Accident Commission (TAC) Pause Stop pop-up sites across the state during the Easter long-weekend, in a concerted effort to reduce road trauma over the holiday period.

This Easter more than 30 sites were set up across the state activated by volunteers, where drivers could pull in, grab a free cup of tea or coffee and a biscuit, but most importantly, they were able to stop and recharge before getting back on the road.

Together, volunteers provided free tea, coffee, and snacks at a range of roadside rest stops throughout Victoria, promoting fatigue management among motorists travelling to enjoy the Easter break.

VICSES volunteers were called to more than 2,100 road crash rescues across the state last year

providing life-saving extrications when people are trapped.

Fatigue is a major contributor to road trauma, particularly when people are travelling long distances on regional roads, so it's important to plan your trip to include a break every two hours and change drivers, if possible.

Driving when tired is a contributing factor in 16% to 20% of all road crashes in Victoria.

TAC research shows that 65% of drivers admit to driving while "quite tired", while 21 per cent admitted to driving while "very tired".

"As the largest road crash rescue provider in the state, our VICSES volunteers would much rather serve you a free cuppa than respond to an accident further down the road," said Alistair Drayton, VICSES Acting Chief Officer Operations.

"There are no excuses for driving tired with fatigue being one of the biggest causes of fatalities and trauma on Victorian roads. We're encouraging motorists every time they drive to understand how a 15-minute break every two hours along the journey, could be what it takes to ensure you arrive alive," said National Driver Reviver Manager, Ashley Pittard.



Knoxfield resident Ismo was involved in a serious car crash last October after his vehicle collided with a pole, leaving him trapped.

He suffered extensive injuries including a punctured lung, seven fractured ribs, a broken wrist and tibia, as well as severe lacerations to his head.

Recently, Ismo was reunited in Melbourne with the highly trained VICSES road crash rescue volunteers from the VICSES Knox Unit, thanking those who had played such an important role in saving his life. 12 of our dedicated Knox Unit volunteers responded to the scene, working tirelessly for over an hour to safely extricate him.

VICSES provides the largest road rescue network in Australia, with 104 accredited Road Crash Rescue provider units across Victoria, and 22 Rescue Support Units.

The Driver Reviver program relies on the generosity of each of its partners: AAMI, FedEx Express, Bushells, Arnott's, and Sunshine Sugar to enable each of its sites to operate. ■



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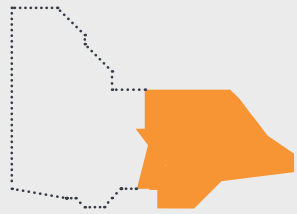
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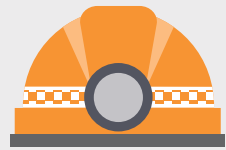
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EASTERN REGION

1 January – 31 March 2025

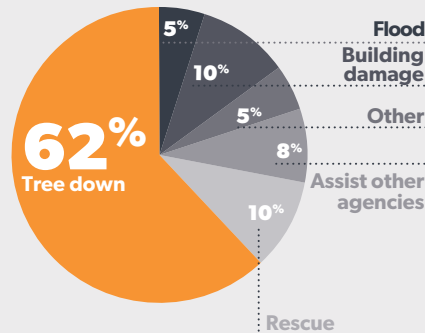


2,694

Volunteers

5,210

Requests for assistance



West Gippsland UST Roadshow strengthens skills and connections

By Allison Norfolk, Community Resilience Coordinator, Eastern Region

In an enthusiastic show of connection and education, the West Gippsland Unit Support Team (UST) recently hit the road to deliver an engaging and informative roadshow for five VICSES units across Gippsland, which included Foster, Morwell, Rosedale, Warragul and Yarram. The event displayed two important assets in the VICSES toolkit — the Driver Reviver Engagement Van (DREV) and the Field Operations Vehicle (FOV) — and proved to be much more than just a vehicle demonstration.

The roadshow was a fantastic opportunity to strengthen collaboration between the UST and units and build operational knowledge across the region. Members from different units came together to learn, share, and connect. The initiative also served as a strategic platform to boost interest in the VICSES Gippsland Regional Unit, aiming to grow its capacity and capabilities.

Throughout the sessions, members gained hands-on experience with both the DREV and the FOV. For many, this was the first time they had been exposed to the communications systems and Incident Control Point principles that underpin effective emergency responses. There was a particular emphasis on building confidence in deploying these vehicles, understanding key features, setup processes, endorsements, and appreciating how they can be activated both during emergencies and for community engagement events.

The UST shared valuable insights, including practical demonstrations on the use of T-cards, field communication protocols, and members shared real-world examples of operational use. This peer-to-peer knowledge sharing was especially beneficial for newer members, who showed enthusiasm and a keen interest in expanding their skill sets.

Importantly, the roadshow also highlighted alternative avenues for volunteering within VICSES. As one member noted, “It’s great to see the vehicles and how we might use them for events or emergencies.” For some, the event sparked a new understanding of how they could contribute beyond traditional emergency response roles, such as supporting Driver Reviver campaigns, building community resilience at events, or assisting in field operations.

The DREV experience was rounded out with a quintessential cuppa and biscuit — a familiar and comforting reminder of the vital role VICSES plays in community safety and engagement.

Reflecting on the event, Lisa Worcester from the West Gippsland UST shared, “We hope the roadshow brought value to our members. Increasing confidence and interest in the Field Operations Vehicle builds the capacity of the Gippsland Regional Unit, which in turn benefits the unit with stronger engagement and better on-ground communications.”

With strong attendance, positive feedback, and a clear appetite for continued learning, the roadshow has laid firm foundations for ongoing support and capability growth across the Gippsland Region. ■



Community rallies behind the VICSES Cobram Unit for a successful open day

By Kate Goldsmith, Deputy Controller, VICSES Cobram Unit

The VICSES Cobram Unit open day held on 29 March was a resounding success, bringing the community together in a vibrant display of connection, learning, and resilience, despite a light drizzle of rain which did little to dampen spirits.

The event attracted an array of community members including young families, older residents, and other members of our increasingly diverse local population. The Cobram Unit team was thrilled to see so many people actively engaging with our members, asking questions, and learning about the critical role that VICSES plays before, during and after emergencies.

The day featured an exciting road crash rescue demonstration, interactive children’s educational activities, and the ever-popular Dutch Thunder Wildlife Rescue display, where participants had the chance to get up close with native animals while learning

about their care and protection during emergencies.

A major highlight of the day for our youngest visitors was the appearance of VICSES mascot Paddy the Platypus, who was an absolute hit with the kids. From high-fives to hugs and happy dances, Paddy brought smiles and energy everywhere he went, reinforcing key safety messages in a fun and engaging way.

The kids’ zone was buzzing all day with a range of emergency awareness games which taught children how to respond safely in an emergency. Other highlights included our interactive doll house display used to spark conversations around fire and storm safety at home, and hands-on experiences with our rescue truck and tools, giving kids and adults alike a rare behind-the-scenes look at the equipment we use during operations.

We were proud to be joined by our incredible emergency services partners, our ‘4am friends’ including Ambulance Victoria, the Cobram Country Fire Authority, the New South Wales State Emergency Service (NSW SES), the NSW SES Tocumwal Unit and NSW SES Deniliquin-Conargo Unit, as well as Shepparton Search and Rescue. Their presence gave attendees the opportunity to see the



collaborative spirit that underpins emergency response in our region.

The Cobram Rotary Club kept the crowd well-fed with a delicious sausage sizzle. The Odesi Coffee Van ensured everyone was caffeinated and warm, while Jeanie’s Face Painting brought colour and fun for the younger guests. Our thanks also go to Synergy Traffic Management for providing the large electronic sign that helped draw attention to the event in the days leading up.

Another key focus of the day was promoting the First 72 Hours campaign, empowering community members to take simple steps to prepare for emergencies and reduce reliance on emergency services in the critical first days of an incident. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with many families taking home plans, flyers, and magnets to start conversations at home about emergency preparedness.

Importantly, the event wasn’t just successful on the ground - it also had a major impact online. Our live-streamed Facebook video and other social media content from the day reached thousands, contributing to an impressive 96,287 views to our Facebook page in 28 days, with some videos receiving more than 5,000 views each. The digital engagement extended our message far beyond those who attended in person, demonstrating the value of combining traditional community

engagement with modern communication tools.

Perhaps the most touching moment of the day came from a visitor who remarked, “You would come and help us in any weather—the least we can do is come out in the rain to support you.” It was a perfect reflection of the community spirit that was felt throughout the event.

The Cobram Unit is incredibly grateful to everyone who made the day such a success, from our emergency services partners and local businesses to our dedicated volunteers, and the wonderful community we serve. We look forward to building on this momentum and continuing to strengthen our connection with the people of Cobram and surrounds. ■

More information

For more updates from the Cobram Unit, follow us on Facebook and stay tuned for future events.



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VICSES Bright Unit bolsters skillset at large scale multi-agency training event

By Glenn Mercer, Community Resilience Coordinator, Eastern Region

Recently, the VICSES Bright Unit conducted a large scale multi agency training exercise simulating a missing person search for five people in bushland. VICSES volunteers from the Beechworth, Bright, Hume Regional, and Myrtleford Units, as well as regional staff participated, along with Ambulance Victoria (AV) and the Mount Beauty Country Fire Authority (CFA), totalling 41 personnel.

Three search teams consisting of six members each conducted a search along bush tracks, locating three missing people, with the use of mules to extract them for treatment by AV paramedics. The two other missing people were located on a steep slope and were required to be extracted by the steep angle team.

Hume Regional Unit and some Bright Unit members utilised the Field Operations Vehicle to act as the control point, providing communications, tracking crews and vehicles, and mapping in the Emergency Management Common Operating Picture (EM-COP). The multi-agency teams allowed interaction between different units and organisations, increasing the already developed relationships



and collaborative approaches. The high angle rescue component was an extremely successful part of the exercise with Mount Beauty CFA improving interaction and teamwork between our agencies and an added touch of realism with AV crew attending to the patients. “Feedback from participants has been positive. In particular, Bright AV and Mount Beauty CFA were most appreciative of the opportunity to do some training in a multi-agency situation. The AV personnel also valued the chance to do a steep

angle exercise,” said Bright Unit Controller Graham Gales. “I would also like to thank Operations Officer Dan Walton for his assistance, along with the Hume Regional Unit for their contributions on the night,” continued Graham. This multi-agency training event was an excellent opportunity to demonstrate capabilities of all agencies allowing increased collaboration and cooperation during a large-scale exercise. Thanks to Graham Gales and the Bright Unit for their work to deliver this training. ■



Shepparton’s Hazaragi and Arabic speaking communities embrace emergency preparedness

By Liz Frazer, Community Resilience Coordinator, Eastern Region

In a major step toward enhancing local resilience, I recently led two targeted emergency preparedness sessions utilising the First 72 Hours program, for people from Shepparton’s Hazaragi and Arabic-speaking communities.

In partnership with Greater Shepparton City Council, the Shepparton Ethnic Council, and Victoria Police, and delivered entirely in Arabic, the sessions engaged over 150 community members with culturally appropriate, practical information and the confidence and skills to act.

- Topics covered included the following:**
- How and when to call for help.
 - Understanding your flood risk.
 - Understanding VicEmergency polygons and warning levels by colour.

- Accessing VicEmergency warnings in Arabic language.
- The First 72 Hours - preparing for an emergency.
- Volunteering in emergency services.

Key outcomes included the following:

Measured capability gains

Building participants’ confidence in calling Triple Zero (000) or 132 500, and requesting an interpreter, rose from fewer than five to more than 30 participants after live practice exercises. Understanding of flood risks at home and work also significantly improved through hands-on mapping using the Local Flood Guides and a giant fabric flood inundation map of Shepparton and Mooroopna.

Practical preparedness

Families began developing personal emergency plans using the First 72 Hours program plan, VICSES grab bags and Arabic-language storm factsheets, equipping them with the tools to better prepare, respond, and stay safe during emergencies.

Internal capacity-building

I had the opportunity to train Community Resilience



Coordinators, Sara Jane Bowering and Glenn Mercer in best-practice engagement with interpreters, strengthening internal capability for inclusive community engagement.

Community empowerment

Two enquiries were received from people interested in volunteering, demonstrating growing trust and community leadership.

This version of the First 72 Hours program is an open-source, multi-agency approved initiative that, along with inclusive and creative facilitation, has proven effective with non-English speaking communities in Shepparton now for several years.

The event was noted by partner agencies for being inclusive, impactful, and built on genuine community connection —

demonstrating the importance of empowering communities together to increase resilience.

This project highlights what is possible when emergency preparedness is made accessible, culturally appropriate, and community-driven — and reinforces the critical role of proactive local leadership in achieving measurable, lasting outcomes. ■



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VICSES
volunteers
learn the ropes
for High Angle
Rescue response

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO

VICSES units conducting technical rope rescues in some of the state’s most challenging terrain have been bolstered with additional turnout capacity, with more volunteers now trained to support their community.



Members representing VICSES Bright, Marysville, Nillumbik and Whittlesea Units recently completed the final stage of their High Angle Rescue Operator accreditation, following a four-day course which saw them learn and refine rescue techniques in partnership with Country Fire Authority (CFA) volunteers from Mount Beauty.

Based at Bright, the course saw volunteers undertake simulated rescue events in natural and man-made landscapes, developing

their skills at the VICSES Bright Unit and at the nearby Bright Brewery in late-March before returning to the region earlier this month to complete simulated rescues at Mount Buffalo and at a telephone tower outside of Bright.

Over the four-day training cycle, volunteers were able to build on their previous completion of Steep Angle Rescue training, constructing and operating complex rope systems in wilderness and industrial environments while fostering camaraderie with their fellow first responders in the process.

Further south, 15 VICSES and CFA high-angle accredited volunteers concurrently gathered near Wonga Park, undertaking a skills maintenance day at the Clifford Park Scout Camp to allow experienced volunteers the chance to further refine their craft in a controlled environment.

The cohort, which included VICSES members from Alexandra and Marysville units and Apollo Bay, Monbulk and Wandin CFA, tested a range of different rescue techniques while undergoing important competency testing to ensure each member showcased the skills necessary to support the safety of their community and fellow first responders.

“Our VICSES steep and high-angle responders across the state show great dedication and professionalism to ensure they can provide vital rescue support in many of the most hard-to-reach parts of our state,” said Andrew Feagan, VICSES Operations Officer Technical Rescue.

While local VICSES units undertake regular high angle rescue skills maintenance in a unit setting, large-scale VICSES and CFA-run training courses are also held several times each year throughout the state to ensure volunteers are well-prepared to manage these high-risk

and high-consequence, multi-agency rescue scenarios.

These courses are often run in partnership with local businesses, Parks Victoria and private landholders, allowing volunteers to accurately simulate real-life rescue scenarios.

In 2024, VICSES volunteers were called to almost 150 high-angle rescues across Victoria.

Andrew Faegan said, “Being able to bolster our network of high-angle rescue accredited volunteers is particularly important this time of year, as community members enjoy hiking and exploring the great outdoors with friends and family over the holiday period”.

Already in 2025, crews have been called to more than 50 designated high-angle rescue scenarios, providing vital support to community members caught in challenging and difficult-to-reach terrain. ■



empowering young women to see themselves as strong, capable leaders—individuals who can make a real difference in their communities. The Rawson event proved just that: every challenge met built confidence, every lesson learned boosted resilience, and every moment shared forged stronger connections.

“Girls on Fire are proud to teach future generations about community safety in a way that is inclusive, actionable, but also incredibly fun alongside such a great group of agencies. The support and the teamwork from AV, CFA, FFMVic, GLaWAC and VICSES were clear at Rawson. Your efforts were what made the Gunaikurnai NAB Cultural Inclusion Fire Camp a success!” said Bronnie Mackintosh, Girls on Fire Chief Executive Officer.

VICSES is honoured to have taken part in such an impactful day, working alongside future leaders who may one day be the ones cutting cars, leading fire response teams, or performing life-saving procedures. Go Girls on Fire! ■

step out of their comfort zones, and rise to every challenge.

Volunteers Raelene Billingsley (Rails) from the VICSES Morwell Unit and Codie Powell, Unit Controller at the VICSES Sale Unit were onsite demonstrating how to safely cut through a vehicle in simulated rescue scenarios—a highlight that captivated the participants and gave them a true sense of the skill and teamwork involved. FFMVic and the CFA had the girls using extinguishers, managing hoses and radios, and engaging in dynamic, simulated fire response exercises. Meanwhile, AV took them through life-saving resuscitation techniques, giving a glimpse into the critical first response role in medical emergencies.

Team spirit grew as the girls tackled each activity with determination and fun. They supported each other, cheered one another on, and celebrated every small victory as a team. There was an undeniable sense of joy, excitement, and pride radiating throughout the two days.

Beyond the practical skills, Girls on Fire is about personal growth. It’s about

Girls on Fire is more than just a program—it’s a movement. Designed to introduce young people to the world of emergency services, it uniquely combines frontline emergency training with cultural immersion. This powerful blend not only teaches crucial disaster management and safety skills but also nurtures participants’ sense of identity, leadership capability, and resilience.

Throughout the day, participants got a thrilling taste of what it’s like to work in emergency response. Under the guidance of Indigenous community leaders and skilled volunteers, the girls were empowered to push boundaries,

From 25-26 March in the scenic town of Rawson, Victoria, the Girls on Fire program sparked enthusiasm, courage, and inspiration as the next generation stepped into the boots of emergency service mentors.

Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) worked closely with the Girls on Fire team to create this special event which was attended by proud young Indigenous girls aged 14–19 years.

VICSES and our emergency service colleagues, Ambulance Victoria (AV), Country Fire Authority (CFA), and Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic) proudly stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the future generation of community leaders, offering hands-on experiences that blended real-life emergency scenarios with cultural strength and connection.



Blazing a trail: VICSES
joins forces with Girls
on Fire in Rawson

By Allison Norfolk, Community Resilience
Coordinator, Eastern Region

Omeo Mountain
Bike Park training
strengthens
volunteer response



By Rachel Rogers, Community Resilience
Coordinator, Eastern Region

Earlier this year members of the East Gippsland Tech Rescue Team along with Ambulance Victoria, the Country Fire Authority, Parks Victoria, the VICSES Bairnsdale Unit Support Team, VICSES Tambo Valley Unit, and Victoria Police were hosted by the East Gippsland Shire at the newly opened Omeo Mountain Bike Park for the High Country Rider exercise, developing their response into the 50km of steep and challenging terrain.

This exercise involved assisting Ambulance Victoria and Victoria Police, and aimed to provide participants experience in locating and utilising emergency markers through the 20 trails. This involved combining the multi-agency rendezvous, convoy driving and incident response with testing of equipment, including operational tools and network coverage in line with the Omeo Mountain Bike Trail Network Multi-Agency Emergency Response Plan.

The first request for assistance to attend the Omeo Mountain Bike Track occurred prior to the public opening when a heavy machinery toppled, injuring a worker. East Gippsland VICSES members are sharing their experience in planning and response with other rescue units to encourage the development and involvement in local emergency planning for mountain bike tracks.

The Omeo Mountain Bike Park is planning a total of 100km worth of tracks within the park and agencies are expecting to respond more frequently to the area. With their recent training, VICSES volunteers and our partners will be well equipped to provide support in this area. ■

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WESTERN REGION

1 January – 31 March 2025

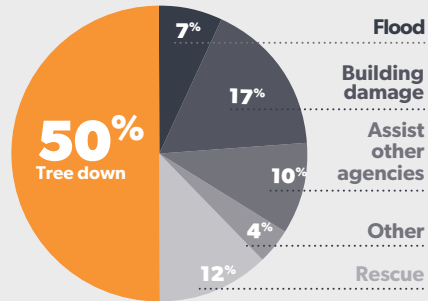


2,481

Volunteers

3,644

Requests for assistance



VICSES Ballarat Unit's Gordon Hicks honoured with inaugural community hero award



By Dharni Giri, Senior Media Advisor, VHO

VICSES is proud to celebrate the outstanding contributions of Gordon Hicks, Unit Controller of the Ballarat Unit, who has been named the recipient of the inaugural Ballarat Community Hero Award in the Emergency Services category.

The award was formally presented on Saturday 4 May during a community recognition event held in conjunction with the Western Bulldogs vs Adelaide Crows AFL match in Ballarat. The award recognises exceptional individuals who have demonstrated ongoing commitment and service to the local community through their role in emergency services.

The award includes a \$5,000 cash prize to be donated to an organisation of the winner's choice. Fittingly, Gordon has chosen the VICSES Ballarat Unit, with the funds to go towards replacing and repairing aging equipment.

Gordon has served as a leader with VICSES for several decades, contributing significantly to emergency preparedness, response and recovery efforts across the Ballarat Region.

In his capacity as Unit Controller, Gordon has led operational responses to severe weather events, including storms and floods, as well as critical search and rescue incidents. His efforts have ensured the safety of the local community during emergencies.

In addition to operational leadership, Gordon has played a key role in promoting community resilience through public education and engagement initiatives, supporting local residents in understanding and preparing for emergency events.

Gordon said "Ballarat is a fantastic place to volunteer, and donating your time is a great way for the community to connect with each other. Volunteering is a great thing to get involved with. It was quite surreal and not something that I expected, but very much for me, this is recognition of the group of volunteers that I work with."

The award also marks a meaningful send-off as Gordon stepped down from his role as Unit Controller at the end of May. It stands as a heartfelt tribute to his decades of service and the lasting impact he has made on the unit and its members.

The Ballarat Community Hero Award not only highlights Gordon's individual achievements but also highlights the essential role of volunteers in Victoria. His leadership and commitment continue to make a significant impact, reflecting the values of the service. ■

Volunteers complete major boat rescue training on Maribyrnong River

By Dharni Giri, Senior Media Advisor, VHO

On Sunday 6 April 2025, approximately 70 VICSES volunteers with 15 rescue boats took to the Maribyrnong River for a large-scale training exercise designed to strengthen the state's boat rescue capabilities.

This skills maintenance training brought together boat rescue accredited VICSES units from across the state, with volunteers representing 17 units practising their skills operating in inland waterways that have seen significant flooding in recent years.

The exercise served as a critical refresher for experienced crew members while also providing hands-on learning opportunities for newer volunteers.

"Our mission is to make sure our crews are fully prepared for real-world emergencies. Training like this ensures we maintain a high standard of skill, safety, and readiness across our teams, because when flooding strikes, seconds matter," said

VICSES Monash Unit Controller and training coordinator, George Haitidis.

The training focused on simulating fast-flowing water conditions, allowing crews to operate Inflatable Rescue Boats and Rescue Boats in a realistic environment. This helps boat crews gain confidence in navigating variable conditions, with the Maribyrnong River's tidal depth ranging from one to three metres.

"Familiarising ourselves with waterways like the Maribyrnong River - especially those that have seen flooding, is essential. Local knowledge is a powerful tool when it comes to keeping people safe during fast-moving emergencies," said George.

As part of the day's activities, volunteers also established

a forward command post to coordinate operations and practised key capabilities such as radio communications and inter-agency coordination.

VICSES Assistant Chief Officer, Regional Learning and Development, Natalie Kenely said "Our volunteers continue to show incredible commitment to protecting Victorians. Giving up their weekend to train on the water shows the kind of passion and professionalism we see across VICSES every day."

The training took place in collaboration with other key

emergency services, including Victoria Police's Water Police squad, and Parks Victoria, reinforcing VICSES's role in joint emergency response operations.

VICSES is the control agency for flood events, while Victoria Police is the lead for water rescues. VICSES volunteers heavily support Victoria Police during these operations and maintains a statewide fleet of boats to respond to:

- Flood operations and water rescues.
- Swift water rescues.
- Marine search and rescue missions/operations. ■



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Western Region upskills over jam-packed training weekend

By Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO



Recently the Western Region had a busy weekend of training events with volunteers participating in courses cultivating a diverse range of essential VICSES skills. This jam-packed weekend included:

- Simulated water rescue scenario generously hosted by URBNSURF, providing a safe and controlled environment for hands-on learning.
- Road crash rescue training involving vehicle re-location and stabilisation.
- 4WD workshop to learn all things 4WD.
- Enhanced rescue course

featuring a learning scenario involving busses and a small truck.

- Crew Member 2 training which provides core competencies for new volunteers, enabling them to move into the next stage of their VICSES journey.
- Incident Agency Commander course in Horsham supporting our people operating in incident control centres.

A huge well done to the Western Region Learning and Development team for organising such a varied training program and thank you to all the amazing volunteers who took time out of their weekend to grow their VICSES skillset! ■



Join now

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



VICSES Castlemaine Unit celebrates WOW Day with heart at high tea

By Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO

On 21 May, the VICSES Castlemaine Unit got into the Wear Orange Wednesday (WOW Day) spirit by hosting special high tea at Buda Historic Home.



Attendees were invited to come dressed in their boldest orange attire to help celebrate the national day to say thank you to all the SES volunteers. There was lots of fun to be had including a raffle and guest speaker, in addition to treats and prizes galore! Community members even got to meet their local VICSES volunteers.

Congratulations to the Castlemaine Unit for hosting such a fabulous event and thank you to the wonderful local businesses who provided support. ■



New Snakes and Ladders game a hit at the Cobden Vintage Rally

By Lisa McDonald, Community Resilience Coordinator, Western Region

The new VICSES hazard themed Snakes and Ladders game was a huge hit at the Cobden Vintage Rally - even Paddy the Platypus joined in on the fun!

While it was a tight race between unit members Paul and John for first place, those pesky floods saw them both slide down to take second and third place respectively. Paddy came through to take first place and was declared the ultimate winner; not just because he was the first to reach the end but also because he made great use of the QR codes on the way up to ensure that he was *Storm Smart*.

The unit is looking forward to continuing to roll out the game

with their newest members to increase storm preparedness in the Cobden community. ■



More information

Find out how you can Be Storm Smart here:



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Easter fun in Bendigo

By Barbara Lemin, volunteer, VICSES Bendigo Unit

Every Good Friday, VICSES Bendigo Unit, together with members from the VICSES Marong and Loddon Mallee Regional units help supervise the Easter egg hunt run by Vision Australia as a fundraiser for Seeing Eye Dogs.

To say it is our favourite community event would be an understatement. It involves around 23 separate egg hunts with 80 to 100 kids participating at a time, which makes up a long day, but one that we all enjoy. We are never short of members to help out. It's lots of work, but it is a time when we can

let our hair down a bit outside of operations. Bendigo's Easter hunt is a day for fun and laughter and making sure the kids have a good time. Best of all, participants leave knowing that the people in orange are there to help in times of need.

The Easter hunts are organised by age group. There is one for the littlies who need help from mum



Seeing Eye Dog puppy in training, with a Vision Australia volunteer.

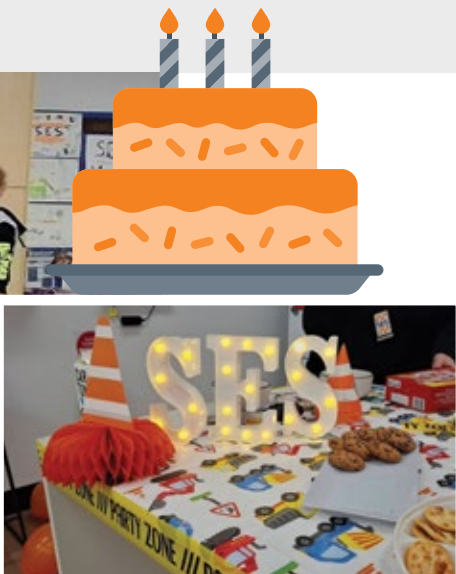
or dad, one for the high activity older kids, and even an Easter hunt for adults. The adult round adds a layer of difficulty with participants wearing glasses to simulate a degree of impaired vision. So, from the cute to the hysterically funny – every Easter hunt is a little bit different, but a lot of fun.

To add to the excitement, there was the bonus of Seeing Eye Dogs and puppies available for pats when we had a break.

We were all exhausted by the time we went home, but the parting comment is usually the same – see you next year! ■



Mike Fisher, aka Fish



VICSES Fawkner Unit celebrates new site's second birthday

By Goldie Pergl, Unit Controller, VICSES Fawkner Unit

In April 2023, the VICSES Fawkner Unit opened its new facility, a long-awaited upgrade for volunteers serving the Merri-bek and Hume communities.

For years, the team operated from ageing sheds in Campbellfield which were prone to flooding and hard to access. The new facility has changed all that. Members now have

proper lockers, a laundry, secure storage and air conditioning, a first for many.

But the move wasn't just about better buildings. The new site,

now located on a busy road, has made VICSES more visible to the local community. People stop by, ask questions, and show more interest in volunteering. Inside the unit, the difference is just as

clear – members now stay back after training, chat more, and the team feels more connected.

In March 2025 the Fawkner Unit celebrated the new site's second birthday with a party. Recruitment has improved and so has retention.

Out the front, a large garden area was part of the new site which needed a bit of love. That's where Bunnings Coburg came in. Bunnings undertook a community project to give the unit's garden a makeover. Bunnings donated plants and staff got involved to remove weeds, plant donated plants, spread mulch and remove green waste.

"Bunnings didn't just drop off materials, they worked

with us side-by-side to help create an amazing garden we can all be proud of" said Amanda Opie, Deputy Controller – Community.

Today, the garden features native, drought-tolerant plants and a peaceful tribute area to honour past volunteers. It's also become home to a few frogs.

"It's more than just a building or a garden," said Kate Turner, Deputy Controller – Members. "It's about creating a space where people feel welcome, supported, and proud to be part of something bigger."

Fawkner's new unit has not only improved operations, it's grown culture and connection. ■

VICSES volunteers strengthen readiness through successful multi-agency exercise in Wallington



By Dharni Giri, Senior Media Advisor, VHO

VICSES volunteers from across the Bellarine Peninsula and surrounding areas successfully came together in May, to participate in a large-scale multi-agency operation - Exercise Mabon - in Wallington.

Coordinated by the VICSES Bellarine Unit, the exercise simulated a major traffic incident involving a collision between a 53-seat passenger bus and a delivery truck, resulting in multiple casualties and complex response challenges.

The scenario was based on a fictional food and wine festival setting and designed to rigorously test multi-agency emergency response capabilities in real time.

The event brought together representatives from Ambulance Victoria, the Country Fire Authority, Fire Rescue Victoria, St John Ambulance, Victoria Police, VICSES and other support agencies and businesses, including local council.

Participants practiced a coordinated emergency

response, including casualty triage and extrication, hazardous material management, and the establishment of command-and-control structures.

The realistic scenario enabled participants to practise responding to a multi-vehicle, multi-casualty emergency involving simulated hazards such as entrapments, smoke effects, and debris. The exercise was conducted under strict safety supervision, with a dedicated Safety Officer on site throughout the day.

The bus used in the scenario was a decommissioned 53-seat coach kindly donated to the VICSES Bellarine Unit in 2015, by Christian's Bus Company. The unit has since utilised the vehicle for training and was pleased to make it available for this significant inter-agency exercise before its final decommissioning.

VICSES extends its appreciation to all participating agencies, facilitators, volunteers, and the local community for their support in making the exercise a success. ■

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OPERATIONAL UPDATES

VICSES deploys to Queensland to support the Cyclone Alfred response

By Jessie Schleibs-Hazelager, Operations Business Coordinator, VHO

Earlier this year the Victorian Emergency Management Commissioner received a formal request from the Queensland SES (QLDSES) for a Victorian deployment to support with requests for assistance resulting from ex-tropical Cyclone Alfred.



VICSES deployed 28 volunteers in a combined Victorian Taskforce with 24 Country Fire Authority (CFA) members, and three staff members led by Operations Manager Priscilla Grimme, to support with the Operations in Queensland following the impacts felt across the southeast of the state. In addition to in the infield crews, VICSES also deployed a Jurisdiction Liaison Officer to support the Victorian members deployed.

Members were deployed across four locations in teams made up of VICSES and CFA members. Victorian multi-agency crews cleared over 130 requests for assistance to support

QLDSES. The Victorian crews engaged in meaningful work that was well suited to their skill sets and our Queensland partner agencies where full of praise with the professionalism and efficiencies shown by the Victorian crews.

All deployed members returned home on Saturday, 15 March 2025.

Thank you for the support from all those who were deployed, in addition to members that provided support in Victoria to ensure our deployed crews had everything needed. ■



Acting Chief Officer Operations Update – High Risk Weather Season closure

By Alistair Drayton, Acting Chief Officer Operations, VHO

With the closure of the 2024-25 High Risk Weather Season, I would like to acknowledge the commitment of all our members' who supported with the events that took place during this period. Our members dedication during this period shows the unmeasurable commitment VICSES members will go to, to keep our communities safe while being flexible and adaptable in challenging situations. With members stepping away from family events and forgoing their holiday rest periods, VICSES was able to respond to 12 Declared Operations including 28 members deploying to Queensland to support with Cyclone Alfred and managing the McCrae Landslide incident in the South East. This is in addition to the training, preparedness, resupply, and logistics activities members undertook pre-season to ensure all units and members met assurance activities outlined to the Emergency Management Commissioner.

Our members deployed directly to events, Incident Control Centres, Regional Control Centres, State Control Centres, and interstate. During this period VICSES responded to 15,409

incidents which included 106,104 hours. Several units have already had their busiest years on record with over two months remaining for the financial year.

While we were busy all over the state, we must also acknowledge the significant statewide contribution to the Grampians Region, which saw long periods of extreme fire activity where VICSES members contributed in many ways, in ground support, staging area management, Incident Management Teams and regional tiers. Given the scale and size of this fire, VICSES was required to undertake an important post fire report which focused on the landslide risk which invariably arises once an area is fire affected. A small team came offline and set out to produce the Grampians National Park Landslide Hazard Plan. This document is a comprehensive guide to the impacted areas outlining what are the issues, where the risks lie and what and if triggers are hit VICSES need to operationalise this plan.

As the season closes, work continues on After Action Reviews and learnings, as well as embedding risk assessments into Regional

Control Teams to ensure we are prepared for potential post fire events.

On behalf of VICSES, thank you to all VICSES members for your support and commitment and for dedicating time during the festive season to donning the orange and showing up for those in need. ■

Seasonal Bushfire Outlook Winter 2025

REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE

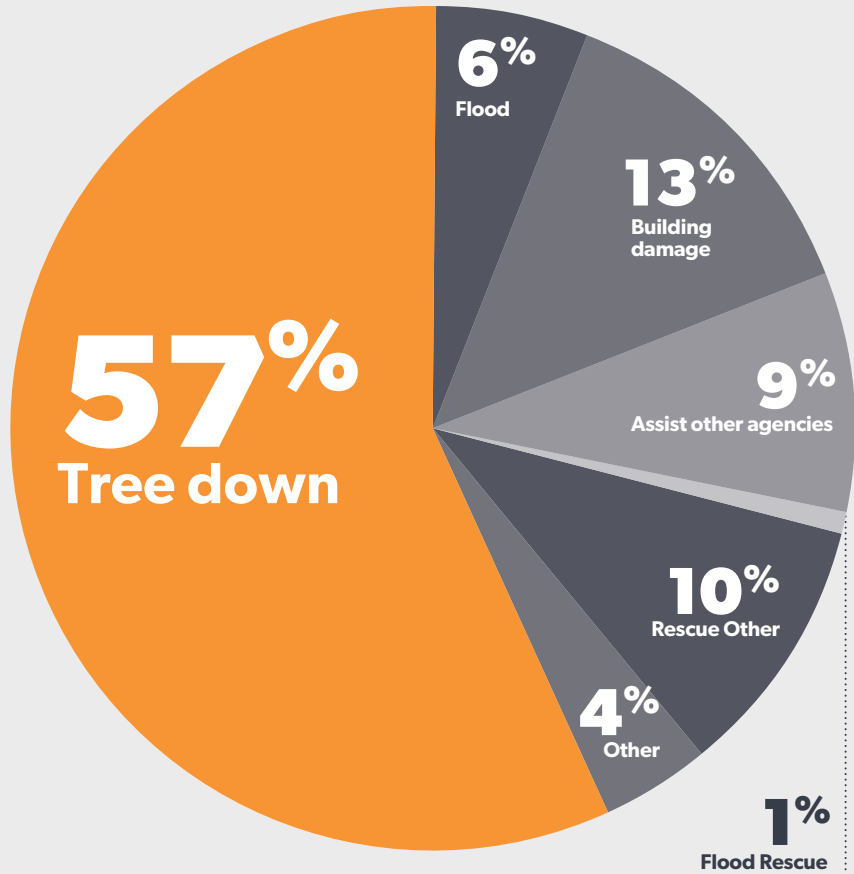
1 January – 31 March 2025

Total

8,861



Breakdown



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History of the Healthwatch program

By Alison Wright, Health and Wellbeing Coordinator, VHO

In January 2011 VICSES launched Healthwatch, a heart health screening programme for volunteers. The pilot was successfully run at our VICSES Mildura Unit in December 2010 and during 2011, 36 Healthwatch session ran with 479 volunteers taking part in the health checks.

Initially the Healthwatch program focused on health checks, using a program developed by the Country Fire Authority. Every member received a printout of their results and a heart health rating. Information at the session included details on cholesterol and blood pressure and what factors could have a detrimental impact on our health.

The health checks are still highly recommended to keep track of those key biomedical indicators which highlight changes (both positive and negative) to our health. Over the years the program has shifted with the development of interactive wellbeing sessions, designed to support VICSES members in their roles and wellness. Topics

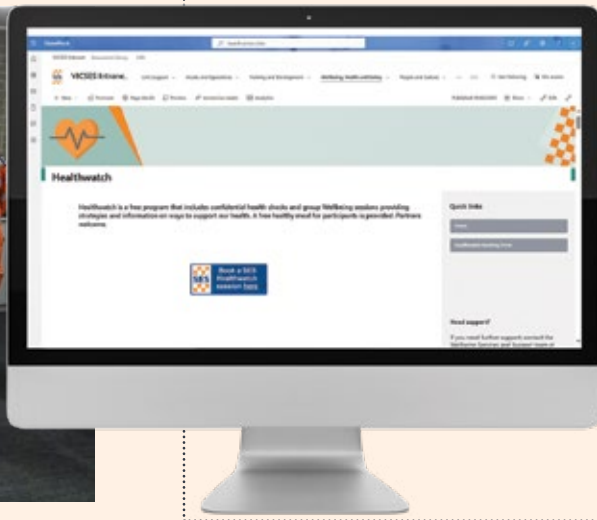
such as Nutrition for Operations and Movement and Mobility, are based on encouraging the creation of positive habits and ideas that can have a big impact on our health overall.

Our Healthwatch team has grown in expertise as well as size, with about 12 health professionals sharing their knowledge and ideas all over Victoria. In 2024, we visited 89 units, ran 1004 health checks and 1,293 participants attended our Wellbeing session.

The Healthwatch program has always covered the cost of a healthy meal at the units we visit. Everyone is encouraged to join in for dinner, regardless of whether a health check is required. It's such a great opportunity to catch up and

swap ideas so we can continue to support the health and wellbeing of all VICSES members.

If you are a VICSES member who is interested in booking a Healthwatch session for your unit, or have any questions or suggestions, please email us at: wellbeing@ses.vic.gov.au



VICSES members can check out our Healthwatch intranet page for links to free resources.

Members can also contact us at wellbeing@ses.vic.gov.au

Remember – just try to do a little every day to support your health, it all adds up. ■

Stay well this winter

By Alison Wright, Health and Wellbeing Coordinator, VHO

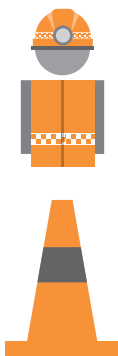
The Healthwatch team have put their heads together and come up with their top five tips for staying fit and healthy throughout the colder months.

1. Protect yourself against the flu! This is proving to be a severe flu season, so make sure you protect yourself by getting vaccinated. VICSES members can take advantage of our free flu vaccination program which is available until July 2025.
2. Prioritise rest and sleep. Research shows that adequate sleep can improve our immune system and ability to fight off illness (and recover from injury).
3. Manage your sugar and alcohol intake. Too much can suppress your immune system and increase

inflammation, which makes us susceptible to catching viruses and infections.

4. Eat well – choose nutrient rich foods, particularly fruit and vegetables which are packed with health boosting chemicals that will see you through the cold weather. Yellow and orange vegetables are particularly high in Vitamin A, protein supports the synthesis of antibodies and leafy greens such as spinach will give you a spring in your step!
5. Move your body, it will reduce the chances of you catching a cold and, if you do get sick, gentle movement can help with recovery. Although it may be preferable to stay inside, a brisk walk or activity gets the immune cells circulating, ready to fight off those pesky pathogens.

SAFETY DRIVES OUR DECISIONS



Health & Safety inspections

Jun 2023 - May 2024

340

Jun 2024 - May 2025

243

Hazards & near miss reports

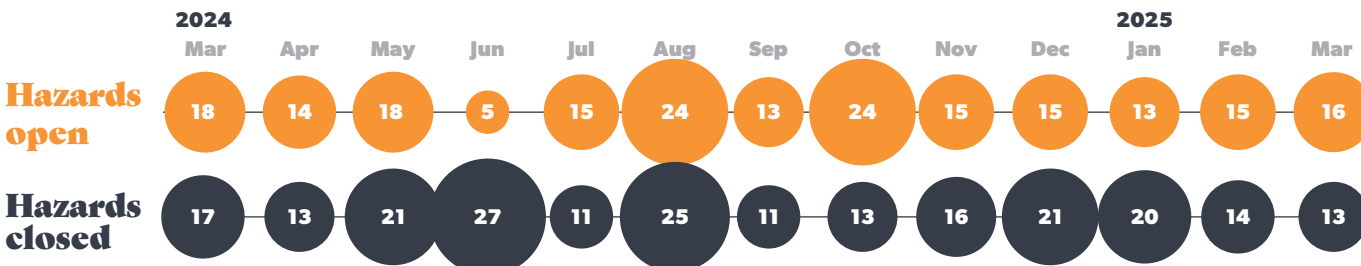
Jun 2023 - May 2024

498

Jun 2024 - May 2025

472

YEAR AT A GLANCE



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COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT

VICSES
takes flight
at the Avalon
Australian
International Airshow

By Chris Longmore, Operations Manager, Barwon Unit Support Team

From 25 to 30 March 2025, VICSES proudly took part in the Avalon Australian International Airshow – Australia’s premier aviation, aerospace, and defence event, and the largest airshow in the Southern Hemisphere.



Drawing 200,000 attendees, with 900 participating companies, 370 aircraft on display, and 43 nations represented, Avalon 2025 provided a remarkable platform for VICSES to showcase our service to a local, national and international audience. Celebrating our 50th anniversary year, VICSES made a strong impression at Avalon, highlighting our critical role in emergency management and community preparedness.

For the first time in nearly three decades, VICSES hosted a dedicated community engagement activation at the event centred around the Driver Reviver Engagement Van. Across three public days, more than 6,100 visitors explored our activation site, with 551 attendees engaging in meaningful conversations about storm and flood preparedness, home safety actions, and opportunities to volunteer with VICSES. Visitors of all ages enjoyed activities including the Preparedness Chain, the giant *Be Storm Smart* Snakes and Ladders game and more.

On display was the Next Generation Heavy Rescue Truck (HRT), drawing strong interest from both the public and other emergency services. Showcasing the future of our operational capability, the HRT was a fitting symbol of how far VICSES has evolved over the past five decades.

75 volunteers and staff from 22 units and offices across Victoria proudly represented VICSES



at Avalon, embodying the spirit of service, teamwork, and professionalism. Operationally, VICSES members were embedded within the Event Operations Centre, working alongside Ambulance Victoria, Victoria Police, fire services and defence representatives, and event organisers. Vehicles and lighting trailers from the VICSES Bellarine, Corio, Torquay and Wyndham units were strategically pre-positioned to provide rapid response capability.

This operational readiness proved essential when an aircraft incident occurred during the event. VICSES assets were moved up to assist Victoria Police investigations — a real-time demonstration of our commitment and capability.

Throughout the event, VICSES’ contributions were acknowledged by visiting leaders, including Acting Emergency Management Commissioner Tim Wiebusch and VICSES Assistant Chief Officer Nicholas Cowham, who took the time to personally thank our members.

Avalon 2025 reflected the very best of VICSES: preparedness, professionalism, connection to community, and pride in service. As we celebrate 50 years, events like The Avalon Australian International Airshow reminds us that no matter the challenge, VICSES remains ready, resilient, and dedicated to the communities we serve. ■

VICSES volunteers promote
preparedness at popular
Seymour expo

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO



Hundreds of Victorians are now better equipped to prepare for emergency situations, after engaging in meaningful conversations with VICSES volunteers at the Seymour Alternative Farming Expo.

VICSES members from across the Hume Region volunteered their time throughout the three-day event beginning on 4 April, encouraging community members to take steps to plan and prepare to act in the event of a local emergency.

Alongside representatives from our partner AAMI, volunteers at the VICSES activation were kept busy by a steady stream of attendees keen to learn more about the role of VICSES in local communities and seek advice about establishing their own emergency kit.

Interstate and international visitors were also able to glean valuable knowledge from local volunteers. Many took home their own VICSES-branded grab-bags to stash important items such as battery-powered radios and torches, food and bottled water, first aid kit and device chargers for immediate access in the event of an emergency evacuation.

VICSES was one of approximately 400 exhibitors with activations at the popular farming event, which was expected to attract in excess of 20,000 attendees to the state’s northeast.



“Grassroots conversations such as these play an important role in saving lives across Victoria, and it’s pleasing to see so many people seeking out additional information and giving consideration to their own emergency plan as a result” said Sara-Jane Bowering, Acting VICSES Community Resilience Coordinator

The VICSES Seymour Unit’s rescue boat and mini-rescue truck were also on hand at the event, proving popular with the expo’s younger demographic and allowing volunteers to promote early awareness of the diverse range of skills and opportunities available within VICSES. ■

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MEDIA

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31 March 2025

Campaigns and events:

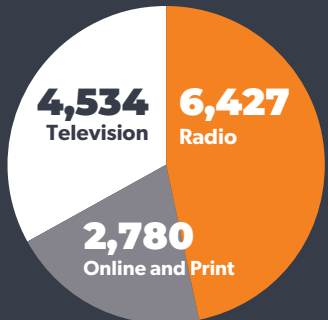
- Women in Rescue
- 50 years of VICSES
- Midsummer Pride March

Media releases:

- 13 January - VICSES members lend support to major Grampians fire response
- 24 January - VICSES St Arnaud Unit volunteers revive road fatigue site

- 25 January - Trio of VICSES stalwarts awarded Emergency Service Medal
- 2 February - Major storm cell results in hundreds of calls for VICSES assistance
- 25 February - Female VICSES volunteers build emergency capacity
- 5 March - Celebrating 50 Years of VICSES
- 11 March - SES volunteers travel to Queensland as part of multiagency deployment
- 31 March - VICSES at the Avalon Australian International Airshow

Mentions of VICSES in the news:



Social media tips and tricks with the VICSES Malvern Unit

By Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO

The VICSES Malvern Unit has recently been experimenting with their approach to their unit’s social media accounts, posting diverse content such as short videos and memes. I caught up with Malvern Unit volunteer, Megan Humphreys to find out more about their fresh approach.

Why is it beneficial for VICSES units to be active on social media?

In this day and age, social media is at the core of how society stays connected and informed. It’s fast, accessible, and serves many purposes; news, entertainment, and communication. For VICSES, it’s a powerful tool to share vital information, raise awareness, and engage with the community in real-time, especially when it matters most.

You’ve recently posted some great Instagram reels. Do you have any tips for how people can get started with these?

- Filming: Capture a variety of shots—wide, close-up, still, and slow pans. Film a few of each and mix them up when editing to keep it interesting. Avoid zooming in and walking while filming as these shots will be grainy and shaky.
- Length: Short and sharp is best! Aim for 7–20 seconds, and lead with your most exciting clips right at the start to hook your audience quickly.

- Editing: You can edit directly on Instagram. I prefer using Final Cut Pro on my computer (iMovie or InShot are great too). There are lots of free editing options, so find what works best for you.
- Colour and lighting: Most footage will benefit from a slight colour and light adjustment. Try increasing the exposure and saturation and slightly decreasing the shadows to give your video a brighter, clearer look. Avoid heavy filters - small tweaks usually go a long way.
- Music: Cut your clips to the beat! You don’t always need fancy transitions - simply timing your edits to music makes your videos engaging and well-paced.

What advice would you give to unit social media admins who want to start being more active on social media or include more variety in their content?

Start by organising your content. Create folders for categories like training, requests for assistance, memes, videos, graphics etc. Stockpile content in advance so you’ve always got something ready to go. This makes it easy to mix things up and keep your feed interesting.

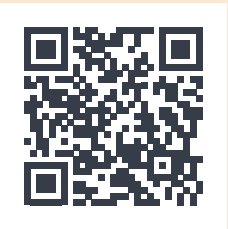
Aim for a good balance between informative, fun, and current content. I know we’ve all got too many tree-down photos (don’t get me wrong they’re great!) but it is best broken up between other types of posts.



Megan Humphreys

Don’t forget to plan ahead, utilise the content calendar to collaborate with your team and map out ideas. Once you’ve got a plan, use Meta’s scheduling tool to set and forget. Consistency is key!

A huge thank you to Megan for taking the time to answer my questions! If you’re keen to see what the Malvern Unit has been up on social media, check them out using this QR code. ■



LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

VICSES attends Fire Department Instructors Conference in Indianapolis USA

By Mark Cattell, Assistant Chief Officer Readiness, VHO

This year VICSES sent a delegation of staff and volunteers to the Fire Department Instructors Conference (FDIC) in Indianapolis USA. Staff and volunteers were chosen from across the state with rescue competencies covering various disciplines and regularly lead training. Members were selected following a competitive expression of interest process. The conference had a focus on alternative vehicles, auto extrication, heavy vehicles (i.e., busses and trucks) and domestic rescue scenarios

where attendees undertook hands on training. The hands-on training included a variety of equipment including Amkus, Genisis, Holmatro, and Hurst (Lucas) to name a few. In addition, there were numerous stabilising and strut systems from Mighty Struts, Paratech and Res-Q-Jack as well as Holmatro. Having the opportunity to evaluate all these tools against each other was invaluable. There were also a number of scenarios where we had the opportunity to see different techniques, some great and some not so good.



The hands-on training regarding electric vehicles was interesting and showed the challenges we as responders will have in the future as these vehicles become more prevalent on our roads. It is our intention to develop some workshops for trainers so that we can pass all this knowledge on. There were a number of classroom sessions discussing several scenarios in the same categories listed above which we also attended. The bottom line is that VICSES does things extremely well - our training and techniques

are among the safest and efficient in the world. A few final stats on the conference: Over 37,000 rescue industry professionals (including career and volunteers) attended the hands-on training, classroom and meeting sessions. 55 countries were represented including Australia, Japan, the United Kingdom. The final days of the conference consisted of a trade show and exhibitions of equipment, technology and systems. ■

IMT Leadership Development Program

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

VICSES hosted the fifth Incident Management Team (IMT) Leadership Development Program in early April. Six VICSES members (including two volunteers) on the pathway to Level 2 IMT Accreditation were joined by staff and volunteer members from the Country Fire Authority, Emergency Management Victoria, Fire Rescue Victoria, Forest Fire Management Victoria, as well as Ambulance

and SES members from across Australia, to complete this intensive five-day program to prepare participants for IMT leadership during major emergencies. We are proud to share that the program had a minimum of 50% female participation and 75% of the facilitators, instructors, key speakers and support team were women.



This program is always a great success thanks to the efforts of our delivery partner Red Flag Real Time Leadership Solutions. We received great feedback from participants on how the program is run, and planning is already

underway for the next course. VICSES is the only agency hosting this specific type of training which sees interstate partners joining the Class 1 Victorian Emergency Service organisations to improve their skills. ■

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WEAR ORANGE WEDNESDAY



Thank you to our incredible
volunteers for 50 years
of dedicated support.