

SUMMER 2025

Community Matters

VICSES

EDITION 33



VICSES

WINS GOLD

PAGE 04

Photo by Sam D'Agostino

AT THE MELBOURNE ROYAL SHOW

Volunteers respond as storms blast the state

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Victorians 'Drop, Cover, and Hold On' for Great ShakeOut

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Photo by Sam D'Agostino



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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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MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER
FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES

Community Matters summer edition, 2025

As we come to the end of another busy and challenging year, I'd like to reflect on the amazing contributions of our VICSES volunteers, who have continued to provide vital support to Victorians in need during storms, floods, rescues, and so much more.

Over the past 12 months, VICSES volunteers have responded to more than 31,000 requests for assistance, including more than 13,000 for trees down, 1,300 for flooding relief, and 4,000 for building damage.

Taking on this portfolio, I've had the opportunity to see first-hand the dedication and skill you bring in showing up for our communities when they need it most. I'm so grateful to all our VICSES members for the difference you make in people's lives – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year. You really are amazing.

I was impressed to see a strong VICSES presence at this year's Melbourne Royal Show. This is a great opportunity to connect directly with communities across the state to drive awareness as Victoria enters its High Risk Weather Season. It was terrific to see visitors of all ages interacting

with our members whether that be by learning about preparing for emergencies or test-driving the inflatable rescue boat. This year, VICSES took home the gold award for community connection – a big congratulations to all involved. You can read more about VICSES' activation on pages 4-5.

In late October, I had the pleasure of visiting the site of Heathcote's new co-located hub for Country Fire Authority (CFA) and VICSES, joined by Treasurer of Victoria, Jaclyn Symes MP, and Acting VICSES Chief Officer Operations, David Baker. This purpose-built facility will be an exciting new chapter for our Heathcote Unit, enabling our emergency services to work together as one in keeping the local community safe.

As we move into summer, we know that the warmer months present additional challenges for our sector, with the increased risk of fires, summer storms and flooding. As always, our people will be ready to respond and support Victorians in need, no matter what the weather conditions.

To all our volunteers – thank you again for your incredible service throughout the year. I hope you have many opportunities to rest and recharge with loved ones over the holiday period.

Stay safe and take care this summer.

Vicki Ward
Minister for
Emergency Services
Minister for Natural
Disaster Recovery



Welcome

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

Firstly, thank you to all those who have supported our communities through recent storm events as we enter the High Risk Weather Season. On 22 and 26 October we saw our first major operational events of the season which resulted in over 2,000 requests for assistance (RFAs) collectively. In particular, I would like to recognise the VICSES Wyndham Unit (in addition to supporting units and agencies) who received over 200 RFAs as a tornado tore through Melbourne's West. This was a huge effort, and I could not be more grateful for all your hard work and perseverance. Read more about these operational events on page 6.

I am thrilled to share that the first Next Gen Heavy Rescue Truck (HRT) has been delivered to the VICSES Frankston Unit. This is a huge milestone for the Next Gen HRT program, and I look forward to seeing more of these vehicles rolling out in the coming years ensuring that we are well equipped to service our communities into the future. Find out more about the HRT rollout on page 8.

It was wonderful to see our VICSES Warracknabeal Unit relocate to their new and improved local headquarters which they celebrated with an open day in late October. The new facility includes the latest upgrades and features, and

more space for training and fleet. You can read more about this facility on page 23.

A big thank you to everyone who was involved in this year's global earthquake drill, the Great ShakeOut. As the control agency for earthquake, this was a valuable opportunity to educate Victorians on how to stay safe in an earthquake, whether that be locally or overseas. It was fantastic to see our VICSES members and the community come together to participate in ShakeOut drills. You can read more about this year's Great ShakeOut on page 18.

As we come to the end of 2025, I want to thank all our incredible VICSES volunteers and staff for your tireless efforts over the past 12 months. You've all done an incredible job providing important community preparedness information and critical support to our communities during times of need. I encourage you to get some rest over the festive season and spend quality time with friends and family.

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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FEATURE



VICSES activation wins gold at the Melbourne Royal Show

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO

We've been recognised for our commitment to preparing Victorian communities for emergencies, receiving the Gold Award for Community Connection as part of the 2025 Melbourne Royal Show Exhibitor Awards.





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Throughout the event, 80 VICSES volunteers and staff from throughout Victoria came together to call on attendees to 'do one thing' which would ensure they were prepared in the event of an emergency, such as clearing gutters, planning for power outages, securing outdoor items, trimming tree branches or creating an emergency plan.

Having taken home the silver award in 2023 and 2024, VICSES was determined to top the podium this time around, debuting a purpose-built inflatable rescue boat and showcasing a host of other interactive exhibits to spark meaningful conversations around emergency preparedness as Victoria enters its Higher Risk Weather Season.

Developed in the months preceding the event, the inflatable rescue boat fitted out by AAMI was designed to be the focal point of VICSES

community engagement activations into the future, allowing children and adults an insight into the variety of skills VICSES volunteers possess to undertake successful rescues.

The site also featured a miniature VICSES truck built for children, a Be Storm Smart themed snakes and ladders game highlighting important storm preparedness actions, and a colouring corner where kids could stay entertained while adults discussed how best to prepare their home for emergencies.

Minister for Emergency Services, The Hon. Vicki Ward made a special appearance to engage with VICSES members onsite, while senior VICSES leadership including Chief Officer Operations Alistair Drayton and Deputy Chief Officers Greg Swindells and Ray Jasper also provided in-person support to the activation at varying times.

The Melbourne Royal Show is VICSES' largest community engagement activation of the year made possible thanks to our community partnership with AAMI, with thousands visiting the VICSES site throughout and more than 900 making formal commitments to take proactive steps to ensure their home and family is prepared over the coming months.

This year's show attracted approximately 400,000 visitors over its 11-day duration, highlighting the important opportunity it provides for emergency services to interact with Victorians and promote lasting behavioural change around emergency preparedness.



More information

For more information about actions you can take to be storm and flood ready, visit our website. ■



Volunteers respond as storms blast the state

By Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO



Community members across Victoria were advised to park their vehicle away from trees, tie down loose outdoor items and avoid unnecessary travel on Wednesday 22 October as damaging and destructive winds tore through the state. VICSES units received over 1,500 requests for assistance (RFAs) in a 24-hour period, with most being for trees down (over 1,000) and many for building damage (over 320). A total of 125 units were activated during this event.





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Our busiest regions included Metro North (487 RFAs), Metro South (251 RFAs), Loddon Mallee (178 RFAs) and Barwon South West (174 RFAs).

The highest wind speed recorded was an intense 130km/h at Wilsons Promontory.

As if that wasn't a large enough flurry of activity on the SES front, Sunday 26 October brought severe thunderstorms impacting Western Victoria including Maryborough, Ballarat, Swan Hill, Kerang, Daylesford, Colac, Melbourne and surrounds.

A tornado ripped through West Melbourne causing widespread damage. The VICSES Wyndham Unit was our busiest unit receiving over 175 RFAs primarily for trees down and building damage.

A huge thank you to all our incredible volunteers who stepped up to support their communities during these severe weather events – your dedication and perseverance is truly admirable.

We'd also like to thank our amazing community members who took the time to prepare their property and get themselves ready before the weather hit. Being prepared for storms can make a big difference in decreasing the level of damage to your property. ■



More information

Find out how you can get prepared for storms on our website.





Frankston Unit receives First Next Generation Heavy Rescue Truck

By Amy Miles, Business Support Coordinator – Critical Assets, State Fleet Centre

The first of the custom-built Next Generation Heavy Rescue Trucks (NextGen HRTs) were officially handed over to the VICSES Frankston Unit on 13 October, marking a significant milestone in VICSES' fleet replacement program.

Developed in close consultation with VICSES volunteers, the Next Gen HRT is a state-of-the-art vehicle capable of carrying up to 2,000 kilograms of rescue equipment, ensuring our volunteers are well-equipped to respond safely and effectively to emergencies across Victoria.

The new design follows an extensive redevelopment and consultation process, supported by the creation of a Rescue Truck Quality Assurance Framework - a model developed to guide the design and build of future rescue vehicles across the service.

Key features include:

- Enhanced ergonomic design for safer and more efficient operations.
- Improved ground and scene LED lighting with cabin door puddle lights for improved visibility.
- Passenger-facing iPad mount for digital navigation and response tools.
- Wind speed detection capability.
- Dedicated welfare locker with a fridge and instant hot water, food and hydration during extended operations.

- Chainsaw workbench for on-site cleaning and maintenance.
- Improved locker stowage for easy access to critical equipment.

The VICSES Wedderburn Unit will receive the next NextGen HRT, with the remaining trucks to be rolled out over the coming years, further strengthening emergency response and keeping Victorians safe.

"The arrival of the NextGen Heavy Rescue Trucks marks a major step forward in how we support communities during emergencies,"

said VICSES Chief Officer Operations Alistair Drayton.

The handover followed the official unveiling of the vehicle by the Minister for Emergency Services, Vicki Ward, at the VICSES State Fleet Centre in September. Minister Ward met with VICSES volunteers and staff involved in the project and promoted key preparedness messages ahead of the storm season.

"These NextGen Heavy Rescue Trucks will be a game-changer for VICSES volunteers – keeping them safe during emergencies," said Minister Ward. ■

VICSES members put their best foot forward at 2025 VPES Games

By Jessie Schleibs-Hazelager, Operations Business Coordinator, VHO

The 2025 Victoria Police and Emergency Services (VPES) Games took place from 5-12 October across metropolitan Melbourne and key regional centres.

In its 44th year, the games offered more than 40 sports and over 175 unique events, catering for over 3,000 emergency service personnel.

This year saw 67 VICSES volunteers and staff compete, winning 43 medals collectively. Senior VICSES staff members also attended the events to cheer on our members and present medals.

The Games allow our members to have fun and build relationships with other emergency services members they may have never met before both from VICSES and in our broader sector. We had some very skilled members walk away with multiple medals, including 18 who received 37 medals across 21 events. Most importantly everyone left with lasting memories from an enjoyable week.

“It was so good to see so many VICSES members attend and participate in the Games this year. It is always a great opportunity for our members to meet and compete with their peers ensuring that our health and wellbeing is a focus while having fun. Thanks to the units who assisted in logistical help and resourcing at various events. I also want to encourage all members to get involved next year!” said Gerry Sheridan, Victoria Police Games Federation Vice President and VICSES’ Operations Officer - Capability Improvement.

A big shout out to our members who also undertook admin and other support roles during the Games, ensuring the event ran smoothly.

We can’t wait for year’s event! ■



It’s not just the wins that matter, but the bond we build through effort, respect, and shared purpose.”

Natalie Davies, VICSES Melton Unit volunteer.



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CAMPAIGNS & EVENTS



VICSES volunteers step up to support Firefighter Stair Climb cause

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO

VICSES volunteers took important steps to support cancer research and crisis support services by tackling the Melbourne Firefighter Stair Climb in September.

More than 20 volunteers in orange flocked from across Victoria to join firefighters and fellow first responders in taking part in the 12th iteration of the 28-floor climb, all while carrying up to 25kg of operational equipment on their backs to simulate a search and rescue scenario.

The heavy backpacks carried by VICSES volunteers aimed to reflect the similar weight being carried by firefighters on the day, many

of whom completed the climb while wearing a breathing apparatus.

The initiative, which brings together firefighters from the Country Fire Authority (CFA), Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV), and Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVIC) to raise funds for Lifeline, the Peter MacCallum Cancer Foundation and the 000 Foundation, also welcomed members from Life Saving Victoria, Victoria Police and VICSES to take part, symbolising the 'We Work As One' approach taken by Victoria's emergency service providers.

VICSES Stawell and Hamilton Units were represented at the climb for the third consecutive year, while nine VICSES units made their debut at this year's event including the VICSES Manningham Unit, which took home organisational bragging rights after securing each of the podium spots in the male open category.

Manningham Unit volunteer Oliver reached the finish line first with a remarkable time of 4:48, narrowly beating out colleagues John and Fynn.

Participating for the first time in her VICSES uniform after previously representing CFA at the event, VICSES Wangaratta Unit volunteer Monique was the fastest female, recording a

time of 5:47 while competing alongside fellow Wangaratta Unit volunteer Jasmine.

Several volunteers also took part in the Masters (40-49) and Grand Masters (50-59) categories, as VICSES involvement in the event more than quadrupled that of the previous year's record.

VICSES Hamilton Unit volunteer Travis successfully raised more than \$5,000 for the cause himself, as the VICSES cohort added more than \$12,000 to the event's \$1.1m total raised. ■



VICSES Cranbourne Unit volunteers realise youngster's birthday wish

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO

A Pearcedale boy with aspirations of becoming a VICSES volunteer has had the opportunity to meet his heroes, after members of VICSES Cranbourne Unit made a surprise appearance at his SES-themed birthday party in October.

Having shown a keen interest in the large rescue trucks driven by VICSES volunteers, and with familial links to the VICSES Sorrento Unit, Harrison's birthday was bathed in orange as he and his friends were made honorary VICSES volunteers for the day.

Dressed in his very own pair of orange SES overalls, Harrison and his buddies were given a crash course in (toy) chainsaw safety by VICSES volunteers before climbing in for a front seat view of the unit's brand-new Medium Rescue Truck (MRT), one of the unit's three fleet vehicles which were in attendance.

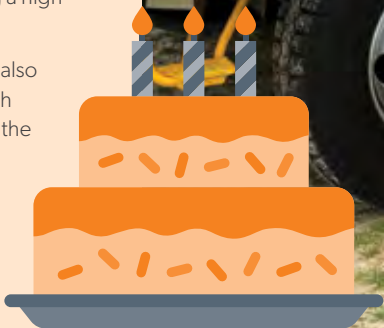
Partygoers were also given a demonstration of the vehicles' emergency lights and the MRT's in-built lighting tower, which local volunteers use to provide timely and efficient lighting at emergencies throughout Melbourne's southeast.

A personalised birthday certificate and a VICSES truck-shaped lunchbox gift served as lasting keepsakes to celebrate Harrison's day, courtesy of the local unit, while VICSES mascot Paddy Platypus also left a lasting impression on festivities, high fiving and posing for photos with a parade of youngsters throughout.

The VICSES theme extended into the event's food options, with children enjoying orange jelly cups and Harrison blowing the candles out on a special birthday cake which depicted VICSES volunteers conducting a high angle rescue of a patient stuck down a cliff.

While volunteers celebrated with Harrison and his friends, the event also provided a perfect opportunity for the brand-new unit to engage with parents and highlight the important role volunteers in orange play in the local community.

Since officially opening the doors of its state-of-the-art headquarters last December, the Cranbourne Unit has been among the state's busiest, with local volunteers called to almost 400 requests for assistance last financial year from community members in need. ■



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1 July – 30 September 2025

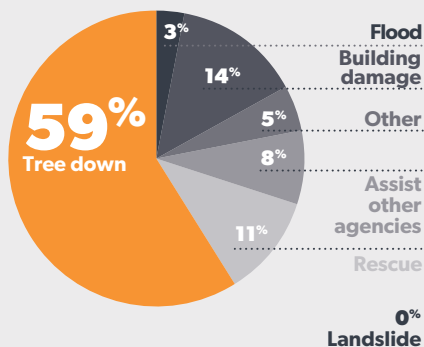


2,758

Volunteers

4,071

Requests for assistance



Volunteers join multi- agency rescue exercise at Arthurs Seat Eagle

By Karen Wilson, VICSES Hastings Unit
Controller, Eastern Region



Volunteers from the VICSES Hastings and Sorrento Units took part in a large-scale, multi-agency emergency rescue exercise at the Arthurs Seat Eagle in late September.

The simulated scenario involved multiple damaged gondolas with 'trapped' passengers – including a person in a wheelchair, a guide dog, and a baby – providing a realistic and challenging training environment for all responding agencies.

VICSES teams were tasked with casualty handling, using mules to transport patients from the point of rescue by High Angle Rescue crews to waiting Ambulance Victoria teams. Each VICSES team was provided with a detailed map of the mountain, showing the gondola line, numbered towers, and cabins. Two crews worked simultaneously at separate locations, using their maps to determine the safest and most effective access and egress routes for patient retrieval.

Local knowledge from Sorrento members proved invaluable, helping the teams navigate the terrain efficiently. VICSES crews also assisted High Angle Rescue teams by removing tree branches that were obstructing access to some gondolas.

VICSES was represented in the Incident Management Team by an Agency Commander, who provided critical intelligence on the number and condition of people trapped in the gondolas. This information played an important role in shaping the rescue plan for the High Angle Rescue teams.

The exercise was a valuable opportunity for VICSES units based in the Mornington Peninsula to collaborate with partner agencies, strengthen interagency coordination, and maintain vital rescue skills.

Participants found the exercise to be a valuable learning opportunity, with feedback including that "it was a fantastic day of teamwork and learning. Exercises like this ensure we're ready to respond effectively when real emergencies occur." ■



Hands-on careers day in Winton hits top gear

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

There weren't any engines revving at Winton Motor Raceway on 14 August. The buzz felt in the surrounds was the energy of more than 1,700 students streaming through the gates for Hands on Careers Day, an action-packed event designed to put future careers directly into young hands.

The day was all about real-world, practical experiences, and VICSES was front and centre with an interactive stand that gave students a taste of life on the emergency services frontline.

The VICSES display featured hands-on activities in patient handling, domestic rescue skills, and more – giving students a genuine opportunity to get involved, ask questions, and understand the challenges and rewards of volunteering.

It wasn't just passing interest – the team reported that over 100 students engaged in meaningful conversations about what it takes to become a VICSES volunteer, with many walking away keen to explore the next steps.

"The level of engagement was incredible," said volunteer Graham Milner. "You could see the lightbulb moments happening - students connecting the dots between the skills we use and the difference we make in the community."

Events like these are vital in inspiring the next generation, and strengthening our ties with local schools, educators, and families. It was a fantastic opportunity to showcase the impact and importance of volunteering, and to plant the seed for future emergency service members.

The impact was real, and the future looks bright! ■



New kitchen at the VICSES Moorabbin Unit is the icing on the cake

By Andrew Holden, VICSES Moorabbin Unit Deputy Controller, Eastern Region

While some improvements have been made to the VICSES Moorabbin Unit facility over the past 23 years, the kitchen from when it was originally built remained in very poor condition. The crew has wanted to upgrade the kitchen for several years. Thankfully, a \$5,000 grant from Bendigo Bank made this upgrade possible, with the remaining funds coming from donations that the unit had kept for purposes such as this.

Over 10 members and their family contributed in some form, from

assisting with demolition, clean up, and painting, to restocking the new kitchen. The process took approximately nine months from applying for the grant to completion of the kitchen.

A huge thank you to Moorabbin volunteer Shiral Fernando who applied for the grant. Thank you also to Angela Kasputtis, our contact at Bendigo Bank, Bunnings who supplied the kitchen at trade prices, and our installers WeDo.

Members now have a clean, modern, and hygienic place to prepare food and to hang out over a cuppa. The upgrade has dramatically increased the use of the kitchen and enables the space to be enjoyed, improving crew member morale. ■



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EASTERN REGION

Pacific island volunteers carving new pathways at VICSES Cobram Unit

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO

A trio of Solomon Islanders currently working in Victoria's north are showcasing their commitment to their new community, donning the orange uniform of the VICSES to provide vital assistance during local emergencies.

Employed at a Cobram meatworks facility as part of the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme, VICSES Cobram Unit volunteers Peter, Philemon and Nathaniel have been paving the way for their compatriots since joining VICSES earlier this year, becoming the first Solomon Islanders to do so.

Driven by a desire to help their community as they would back home, Peter's decision to reach out to the local unit after researching the organisation online subsequently sparked a chain reaction, resulting in the trio of friends quickly being welcomed into a new family of like-minded volunteers.



Showing a strong capability to learn new skills and a willingness to apply themselves to training and out of hours response, the trio has become well-respected within both the Cobram Unit and the neighbouring New South Wales SES Tocumwal Unit as they've developed their core capabilities, with a particular focus on storm response.

Serving as dual members due to their proximity to the Victorian-New South Wales border, the trio have each completed their Crew Member Supervised and Crew Member Level One qualifications, ensuring they have the skills and knowledge to support communities on either side of the Murray River during their times of need.

They've also been regular fixtures at major local events such as the Cobram Show and the Deniliquin Ute Muster, engaging directly with their communities and highlighting the value of emergency preparedness in a region prone to flood and storm events.

The addition of Peter, Philemon and Nathaniel has highlighted the inclusive nature of SES in



Cobram and further afield, exemplifying the value short-term and long-term visa holders can add to their community by volunteering with organisations such as VICSES.

Word of the trio's committed service to the Cobram community has also made its way overseas, with their involvement with VICSES the subject of local Solomon Island newspaper and radio coverage earlier this year and sparking interest from family and friends back home around how they could follow suit if ever in Victoria.

Now entering their last 12 months of a working visa, all three men have developed a range of vital emergency response skills to take back to their homes in Auki (Peter and Philemon) and Tulangi (Nathaniel) to assist the community informally, with their home islands historically prone to storm and cyclonic conditions.

For now, they're more than happy to give back to their adopted home anyway they can, blazing a trail for others to follow in the process. ■

VICSES Warragul Unit celebrates half century of emergency response

By Maida Phillips, VICSES Warragul Unit Deputy
Controller, Eastern Region

The Warragul Unit celebrated its 50th anniversary with a Community Open Day and Awards Night in October.

This milestone event honoured five decades of dedicated volunteer service and showcased the vital work VICSES does in emergency response, community safety and resilience.



A'hoi! VICSES Bairnsdale Unit gets involved in multi-agency boating training

By Rachel Rogers, Community Resilience Coordinator, Eastern Region



A multi-agency emergency management exercise was conducted on Thursday 16 October at Raymond Island.

The objective of the exercise was to test and strengthen how emergency services work together when responding to emergencies on Raymond Island during periods where the primary ferry is out of service, utilising the Sampson Barge and Ugly Betty water taxi to travel across McMillan Strait between Paynesville and Raymond Island.

The VICSES Bairnsdale Unit alongside Ambulance Victoria, the Country Fire Authority, East Gippsland Shire Council, Gippsland Lakes Barge Services, and Paynesville Coast Guard focused on response processes and command, control and coordination priorities.

Response activities included road crash rescue operations, medical aid, establishment of command points and vehicle collision investigation.

This training scenario was a terrific learning opportunity and has no doubt strengthened our water-based emergency response. ■

Highlights of the open day included live demonstrations, photo displays and kids' activities.

Following the Open Day, the unit hosted a celebration event where life memberships were awarded to nine outstanding individuals, including Shane Hewson, John McLennan, Wendy Shiels, the late Colin Shiels, David Sparks, Rex Skinner, Robert Vermay, Cath Wood and Peter Wood.

With over 200 years of combined service, these members have each played an integral role in the unit and dedicated thousands of hours of their time to help to make the unit what it is today. ■



Kelly runs, jumps and throws herself to gold at the VPES Games

By Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO

VICSES Seymour Unit volunteer Kelly has taken home an array of gold and silver medals after her winning streak at the Victoria Police and Emergency Services Games (VPES Games). Having competed in various VPES Games events over the past four years, this year Kelly chose to participate in athletics. Kelly clearly knows her strengths, winning gold in the 100-metre run, 3,000-metre walk, discus, and javelin. She also scored silver in the 200-metre run, long jump and shot put.

"The VPES Games is an opportunity to have a bit of fun amidst some friendly rivalry with the other agencies. I always look forward to participating and enjoy trying out the different events," said Kelly.

Her advice to anyone thinking about getting involved in the next VPES Games is to give it a crack.

"It's a bit of fun and everybody's really supportive. Just because you're not a pro at a particular sport doesn't mean you can't have a go – there's always someone around to give you some tips and tricks," said Kelly.

Kelly has been volunteering in emergency services for over 14 years, having started out at the Country Fire Authority before joining VICSES. She's ticked off most areas of training from the list by now and particularly enjoys boating and land search related operations. ■

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EASTERN REGION

Meet Samantha Gatty, Beechworth's new Unit Controller

By Glenn Mercer, Community Resilience Coordinator, Eastern Region



Congratulations to Samantha Gatty on being appointed Controller of the VICSES Beechworth Unit. We spoke to Sam to get to know her better and find out what it's like to be a new Unit Controller at VICSES!



What do you like about volunteering in emergency services?

Helping the community – I've always wanted to do something like volunteering for VICSES. I feel so fortunate to work alongside the awesome Beechworth team who contribute so much within and for their community.

Can you tell us a bit about your background outside of VICSES?

I am a mother of a 15-year-old daughter who is progressing to obtain her pilot licence which is very exciting! I also run a small business and do part time work. I have performed managerial roles which will help me as Unit Controller and have been a member of the Army Reserve.

Prior to becoming Unit Controller, have you undertaken any other roles within VICSES?

I was undertaking community engagement work (just recently completed my Community Engagement Facilitator course, and that was amazing), along with recruitment and health and safety tasks, in addition to being an operational member.

What's a moment from your VICSES journey you've been most proud of?

A few years ago, we had a massive downpour and flash flooding which affected Beechworth. To be able to help the community in its time of need is special to me. I was filling multiple sandbags for that incident and must admit - I enjoy filling sandbags!

What are you most excited about in your new role as Unit Controller?

Being able to build on the current unit structure as well as improving awareness of VICSES in the Beechworth community, which we are already starting to achieve. I'm also excited about getting to work alongside our neighbouring units to improve service capability to our communities. ■



Falls Creek Awards

By Debbie Howie, VICSES Falls Creek Unit volunteer (Media Liaison), Eastern Region

VICSES Falls Creek Unit members were recently recognised for their significant service to the community at an awards dinner at Lodge Falls Creek.

Attempting to present awards were Acting Deputy Chief Officer Ray Jasper ESM, Deputy Chief Officer Cain Trist, Assistant Chief Officer Dean O'Hara, Operations Manager Charlie Sexton, and Volunteer Support Officer Lucinda Leverett.

At the dinner, awards were presented to the following members for their significant service to the community and VICSES.

- 5 Years - Andrew Rist, Damien Myers, Fraser Wilkinson, Myra Rist, Sven Erikson

- 10 years - Brett Williams, David Etherton, David Quick, Mark Weir, Nick Demopoulos
- 15 years - Damian Allport, Fred Weir, Laif Moegel, Renja Moegel
- 30 years - Debbie Howie
- 40 years - Robin Spargo, Yogi Moegel

Additional awards acknowledged volunteers for their contributions during the 2022 floods, which caused a landslip on Bogong High Plains Road.

Mansfield’s emergency services collaborate in bus vs car training exercise

By Roslyn Fauvel, VICSES Mansfield Unit Controller, Eastern Region and George Crawford, Leading Senior Constable, Victoria Police

On 8 October 2025, over 60 participants from the VICSES Mansfield Unit, Bonnie Doon, Maindample and Mount Buller Country Fire Authority (CFA) brigades, Ambulance Victoria paramedics and local Victoria Police members got together for a multiagency field training exercise conducted at the Mansfield Unit.

Falls Creek Search and Rescue began in 1958 with few resources and limited funding from Falls Creek Tourist Area Management Committee – now Alpine Resorts Victoria. It became an official VICSES unit in the early 1980s, providing appropriate resources and additional specialised training. The Falls Creek Unit has a unique role working in the alpine environment, experiencing challenging conditions during both summer and winter. The crew conduct weekly winter exercises on the Alpine High Plains, navigating rapidly changing environments which include snowdrifts, crevices, and potential avalanche sites. The unit also supports the community with the Kangaroo Hoppet, a major international event conducted in the High Plains along with the annual Ice Plunge.

The Falls Creek Unit’s expertise ensures safe access for visitors and supports critical search and rescue operations all year round. ■

Mansfield region is blessed with some amazing emergency services personnel who take pride in delivering an essential first response to any emergency event in our area. We have a huge skillset and it’s important for our members to maintain and hone these skills in a practical setting.

Each agency does a huge amount of training with its members, however it is not often we are able to all get together for a joint training exercise like this. Mansfield has a history of making the extra effort to undertake collaborative exercises like this.

The scenario for this exercise was a stolen vehicle overtaking a large bus returning from the snow, with the vehicle clipping the bus in a narrow overtake, sending both vehicles off the road. The scenario then included the bus hitting a fixed object from a speed of approximately 80 km/hr, while the offending vehicle spun out clipping and taking down a power pole.

With the scene staged by expert representatives from Ambulance Victoria, CFA, VICSES, and Victoria Police, the responding crews entered a scene with

sparklers inserted into a fake powerline and fuel leaking from one car. An LPG cylinder was there to isolate the fuel, and a bus was occupied with patients, yelling for help. There was a great deal of attention to detail in the presentation of the scenario, with paint transfers on vehicles from the collision, skid marks and scattered debris across the scene creating the ‘evidence’ of what had occurred. The volunteer actors from the bus gave a stellar performance of needing aid. The mock patients were injured in multiple ways and required medical attention.

The first team to arrive was CFA who ensured the scene was safe and they were ready for any flare up from the vehicles. VICSES members got to work as there were some complex extractions from the bus which required hydraulic tools. Ambulance Victoria and VICSES worked closely to stabilise and mobilise the patients from the bus. Ambulance Victoria calmly triaged and attended to the injured. Victoria Police members then entered the scene, managing the overall response, traffic diversions, notifications and investigations. The occupants from the overtaking vehicle turned out to be wanted for a string of robberies and were taken into custody without incident. VICSES crews ensured that effective lighting was being provided for rescue efforts and investigations.

Even amidst the chaos, the sunset was a breathtaking backdrop to the exercise. CFA sprang into action in response to a fire flaring up in the offending vehicle right as Ambulance Victoria and VICSES were extracting patients from the bus.

Members from all the involved agencies commented on how great the exercise was for their development. The networking and bonding that occurs between agencies at these training sessions sets up our local responders to tackle the toughest of challenges. Overall, the exercise was a huge success, and it was amazing to see all the agencies get together to ensure the emergency was addressed with absolute professionalism. ■

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WESTERN REGION

1 July – 30 September 2025

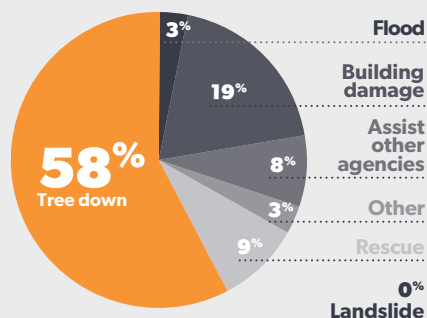


2,527

Volunteers

4,596

Requests for assistance



Caravan and Residential Parks Victoria Information and Training Day



By Steve Cunneen, Acting Community Resilience Coordinator, Western Region

Portarlington Country Fire Authority (CFA) hosted a fantastic Information and Training Day which saw over 40 managers and staff involved in caravan parks from across the state engage with both CFA and VICSES on key safety messages. With a focus on getting summer ready, industry members gained valuable insights into bushfire preparedness, emergency planning and best practice fire safety.

The VICSES Bellarine Unit, supported by the Barwon Southwest Unit Support Team presented lessons learnt from previous emergency situations regarding responses in caravan parks. This session was a great way to highlight the importance of including VICSES in emergency management plans and what scenarios we can respond to.

It was amazing to see the Bellarine community engagement team follow the Community Engagement Facilitator framework and deliver both purposeful and meaningful conversations. Combining with the CFA helped us to deliver the key messages even more effectively. Feedback from attendees was incredibly positive. Most managers took to the message of 'do one thing' and were keen to implement this campaign in their workplaces. ■





Kids Rescue Truck celebrates its 10th birthday with a facelift

By Graeme Ashton, VICSES Nillumbik Unit volunteer, Western Region

While VICSES proudly celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, Kids Rescue (our kids sized rescue truck) has proudly turned 10. To acknowledge the impact that Kids Rescue has had across the state, one of our younger members of the VICSES Nillumbik Unit, ‘the original home of Kids Rescue’, decided to give our smallest truck a new paint job and headgear.

Josh, our 2025 Young Member Excellence Award recipient, had found an obsolete red and blue lighting unit and realised that it could be repurposed on our favourite truck. Once he started the process and drilled new holes to fill gaps left by removing the old units, he realised our little truck needed some TLC. After all, it had spent the last 10 years of its life at the mercy

of its favourite friends - the local kids, who queued up whenever it left our shed. Kids Rescue came into being after some of our members went to our main community engagement event, the Eltham Festival. The group had seen that children didn’t relate to our big trucks that we were proudly displaying, and this stopped us getting to a large part of the audience we were trying to

engage with. We had noticed that the youngsters were attracted to exhibits that were of a size that they related to and had the element of play. After a bit of research on what was a suitable size, the plans developed and what we now know as Kids Rescue, evolved. Several years later, Kids Rescue got a sand-trailer to tow. Because of the success of Kids Rescue, we had to find other ways to keep the

young ones engaged while they waited for their turn at the steering wheel, and that all important switch which activates the siren. Some of our members often go to other units for activities such as community engagement exercises and even deployments and often find a version of Kids Rescue in their sheds. This is a testament to how a good idea can grow from something small and spread into something big. ■



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My story: Responding to the August wind event

By Bel M, VICSES Heywood Unit volunteer, Western Region

As the wind picked up early Friday evening, my house was shaking. 12 months prior my house had damage from the wind gusts of 100kms an hour. This time the expected gusts were 120kmh.

I was concerned for my home and my pets who would be there by themselves. I had already done all I could to prepare - all I could do was wait and hope. Then bam, the first page went off at 7:38pm, and then another and another, and they just kept coming moments after each other. Immediately I jumped in my car and went to my unit. I was met by four other crew members (I call them 'teamies') and we got to work.

We kept going to job after job after job - there were too many to count. As soon as we would clear one tree, we'd begin traveling to the next, and we'd stop to clear another four or five trees between each call-out.

Victoria Police helped guide us where they could - at times they also couldn't move far between fallen trees. We didn't know if more trees were falling after we cleared each road, all we could do was hope for safe travels for everyone. The Country Fire Authority (CFA) and Council contractors were out working as well.

We all just kept going. We would have all normally been asleep in bed by now, but we kept going - we had to. We wanted to help keep

everyone in our community, the truckers, the travellers, our fellow emergency responders, as safe as we could.

We all went to our respective homes at 6:00am. The pager kept going off for more tree down jobs, which were non-urgent, and we would attend to in the morning, but we couldn't do any more until after we had some kip. Our sleep was very disturbed because the pager was still going off. We dared not silence the alerting systems. If it was a Foxtrot (Priority One request for assistance), we'd be out the door in a jiffy to help.

Between us all, we went from Heywood, to Myamyn, Dartmoor, Tyrendarra, the South Australian border, and everywhere in between. Each time we hopped out of the vehicle, just by being out in the weather we put ourselves in danger - we could see that with the number of large trees that had fallen. For the next couple of days there were more jobs that came in, mainly for trees down on not-so-well used roads. And we did it all again the following week. The weather is funny like that!

The parts I loved the most were the teamwork - we each showed respect for each other's

strengths, abilities and support needs. Honestly, I am so proud of our little unit for handling such high demand, to keep our community safe. There were just five of us and two vehicles covering the highest number of RFAs in the state. We all felt like we accomplished something way bigger than we could have imagined, and were thankful for support from our neighbouring units to pick up the pieces in the following days.

The highlight was seeing one of my teamie's confidence grow and seeing her feel proud of herself for doing something that she wouldn't have thought she could have done. We hugged and I thought to myself, 'this is comradeship'. This is why I joined VICSES - for my community, to grow, to belong, and to be part of something bigger than me. ■



‘Are You Ready?’ campaign launch

By Steve Cunneen, Acting Community Resilience Coordinator,
Western Region

In collaboration with Melton City Council and Wyndham City Council, the ‘Are You Ready?’ campaign was launched at the Wyndham council offices on 1 October 2025.

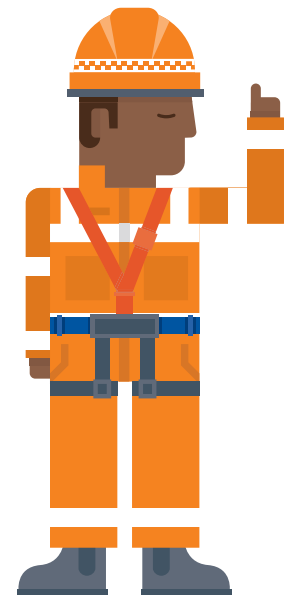
This program saw 15 videos professionally produced in 11 different languages educating the community on who to call and what to expect in an emergency, with funding provided by the councils involved to better prepare and support their communities. The campaign provides practical tips to keep your family safe in a range of situations and supports developing more resilient communities.

The launch involved agencies including VICSES, Ambulance Victoria, the Country Fire Authority, Fire Rescue Victoria and Triple Zero Victoria. With over 200 people in attendance, the Wyndham council and the mayor recognised the importance of preparation and preparedness in a significantly diverse community. In Wyndham council, 46% of the community uses English as their second language.

The VICSES Wyndham Unit provided great support. We saw great community engagement and delivery of key messages to both the community and other agencies present. Well done to the Wyndham Unit volunteers, who presented with professionalism and polish. ■

More information

You can find more information about this campaign here:



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Elmore Field Days 2025

By Layton Miller, Community Resilience Coordinator, Western Region

Once again, the Elmore Field Days have come and gone – and what an incredible ride it has been!

This year's event saw an estimated 30,000 visitors flock to the Elmore Field Days site over three action-packed days, from 7-9 October. The weather was kind to us, with the sun shining for most of the event and just a few gusty winds on the final day to remind us who's boss.

More than 700 exhibitors were in attendance, showcasing everything from agricultural products, health and wellness, arts and crafts, hardware, and much more. The Elmore site is so large it even boasts its own airstrip – and yes, several visitors did fly in to be part of the action.

This year, the VICSES site focused on promoting awareness for the High Risk Weather Season and highlighting the importance of emergency preparedness. Our team had the privilege of engaging with visitors from all corners of Victoria – metropolitan Melbourne, regional

communities, and even parts of regional New South Wales. We also had some fantastic conversations with members of multicultural communities, broadening our reach and understanding across diverse groups.

One exciting takeaway? Don't be surprised if you spot a few more people wearing orange soon – our recruitment efforts certainly sparked interest!

The breakdown:

Over the three days, the VICSES site welcomed:

- 1,000+ visitors through the display.
- 500 community engagements.
- 200+ custom badges created by enthusiastic attendees.
- 20 dedicated volunteers and staff contributing their time and expertise.
- 300+ hours invested in preparation, setup, and delivery.

This year's success would not have been possible without the incredible support of our Bendigo, Castlemaine, Gisborne, Kyabram, Loddon Mallee Regional, Marong, Rushworth, Rochester Units as well as our Mid-West Unit Support Team. Thank you also to the Western Region Learning and Development team and Volunteer Recruitment Advisor (Western), Jamie Macri.



To everyone who contributed their time, resources, and energy – a huge thank you! Your efforts helped make Elmore Field Days 2025 another standout event for VICSES and our community. ■

VICSES Warracknabeal Units celebrate official opening

By Crystal Sanders, Community Resilience Coordinator, Western Region

The Warracknabeal community gathered on Saturday 25 October to celebrate the official opening of the new VICSES Warracknabeal Unit.

It was a fantastic day for volunteers and the local community, marking the beginning of a new chapter for the Warracknabeal Unit. The new facility will provide a modern base for local VICSES volunteers to train, respond, and continue serving the community during emergencies such as floods, storms, and road rescues.

Operations Officer – Emergency Management, Jordan Bush, officially opened the new unit and took the opportunity to thank members, their families, and the wider community for their ongoing support and contribution.

Attendees included Yarriambiack Shire Mayor Kylie Zanker and representatives from the Country Fire Authority and Victoria Police. VICSES representatives included Greg Swindells, Deputy Chief Officer – Service Delivery (Western Region), Jackson Bell, Assistance Chief Officer – Learning and

Development (Western Region), and Peter Dunn, Senior Project Manager Grants. We saw a wonderful turnout from local volunteers, their families, and former Unit Controllers.

Following the formalities, guests enjoyed a barbecue lunch and the chance to explore the new facility, meet the volunteers, and celebrate this proud moment together.

The event was a great success and a true reflection of the community spirit that continues to make Warracknabeal Unit strong. ■



Image supplied by Ben Fraser, Wimmera Mallee News



VICSES Winchelsea Unit meets growing demand in community

By Kerri Cropley, VICSES Winchelsea Unit community engagement volunteer, Western Region

In the past 10 years, significant residential subdivision and new housing have seen Winchelsea’s population double to over 4,000 residents. Our local shire has projected Winchelsea will grow beyond 10,000 people in coming years.

Our small team at the VICSES Winchelsea Unit have been working tirelessly to keep up with our rapidly growing community, with calls for assistance more than doubling over the past five years.

At the end of 2024, our unit consisted of only 10 operational members. So, the decision was made to commence 2025 with a recruitment drive, to build up the unit to cope with the demands of our growing community.

We focused on letter box drops, a recruitment display at our local market, articles in the local paper and a highly successful information night.

As a result, we were thrilled to welcome eight new enthusiastic members!

Over the past few months, we have celebrated our members completing their road

crash rescue accreditation, chainsaw, traffic management, Safe Working at Heights (SWAHS), and Crew Member Level 2 qualifications.

Our Winchelsea Unit ‘family’ may be small compared to other units, but we have had a huge year of growth, which is appreciated by our local community. ■



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OPERATIONAL UPDATES

Learning together: 2025 Masterclasses build skills and connections

By Chris Longmore, Manager Capability Framework, VHO

Each year, the VICSES Operations team runs a Masterclass program to upskill members in a particular area of our work. This year's Masterclass program, focusing on landslide (which VICSES is the control agency for) was all about connection, collaboration, and capability in action.

In August and September, more than 90 staff came together for two Landslide Masterclasses. These energetic, hands-on sessions blended expert insights with real-world exercises. Across the two-day program, participants heard from organisations including the Bureau of Meteorology, Geotechnical Engineering, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, and VICSES technical specialists, exploring everything from landslide risk and response planning to public information, media, and doctrine in practice.

The refreshed approach put learning into action. Teams tackled scenario-based exercises and shared local experiences, and tested tools and techniques

designed to strengthen how we plan, respond to, and communicate during major events. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive with participants enjoying the mix of theory and practical activities, the opportunity to connect with colleagues, and the chance to work directly with partner agencies. The new format made learning engaging and relevant, reinforcing our commitment to continual capability growth.

Building on this success, the Regional Volunteer Masterclasses are taking the program out to volunteers in the regions through November and December 2025. Delivered at the Unit Area Grouping level by local Operations





Officers Emergency Management and Community Resilience Coordinators, these sessions bring the same interactive spirit to volunteers right across the state. With over 150 volunteers already registered, the regional events focus on landslide risk, local response and escalation utilising tools such as 'Snap Send Solve' and Emergency Management Common Operating Picture (EM-COP), giving participants the chance to build confidence in the systems and scenarios which matter most in their area.

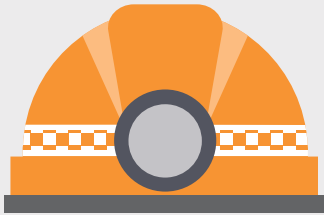
A huge thank you to the organising committee - Cameron Rothnie, Chris Longmore, John Newlands, and Kellie Oates – as well as to Acting Deputy Chief Officer Ray Jasper and all presenters for helping make the 2025 Masterclass such a success. Together we're building stronger, more connected teams ready to meet any challenge. ■



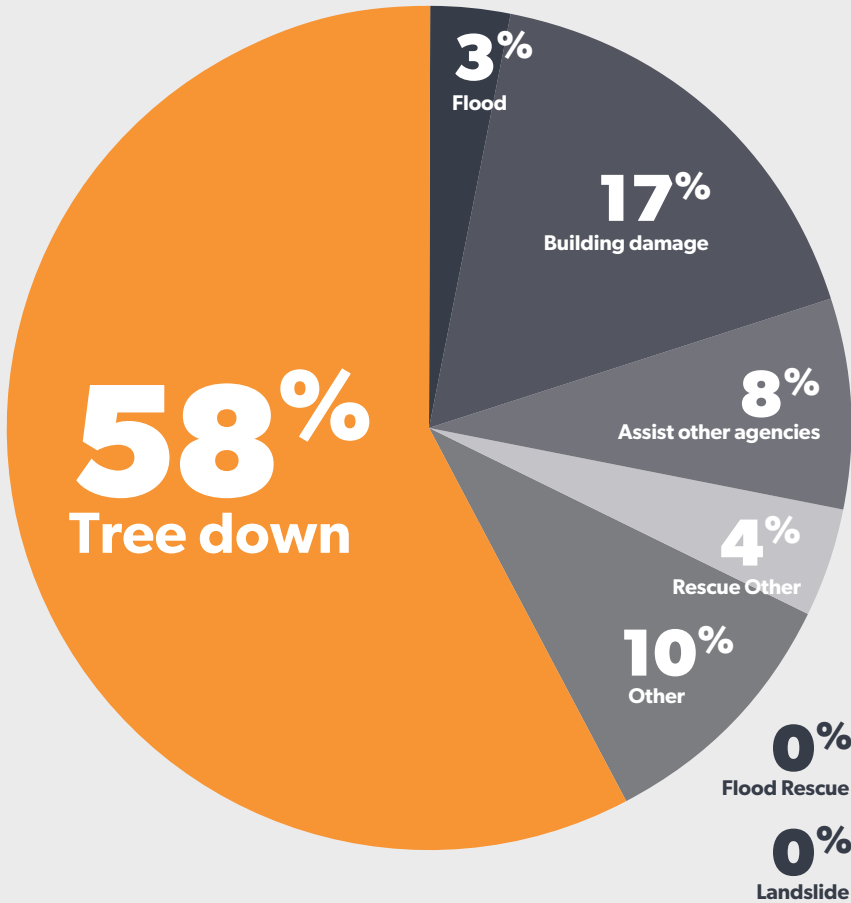
REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE

1 July – 30 September 2025

Total
8,745



Breakdown



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WELLBEING, HEALTH & SAFETY

Step It Up 2025 Wrap Up

By Belinda Rawson, Wellbeing Services Business Coordinator, VHO

The 2025 Step It Up campaign has officially wrapped up – and what an incredible effort it's been from VICSES members across the state! This year saw record breaking enthusiasm, with participation numbers nearing an all-time high. As the September sunshine smiled down, more than 900 participants from 78 teams laced up their shoes and took on the challenge once again.

Across four weeks, members from units big and small joined in a friendly competition to achieve VICSES highest average step count. Thousands of steps were logged daily as participants encouraged one another to keep moving – rain, hail, or shine. With weekly challenges, creative photo prompts, and prizes up for grabs, motivation stayed high from start to finish.

Step It Up is about more than fitness. It's a celebration of movement, connection, and community. Staying active supports both physical and mental wellbeing – reducing stress, boosting mood, and strengthening resilience, all essential for the incredible work our volunteers and staff do to keep Victorians safe.

This year's results were nothing short of outstanding. Over the month, the average step count steadily climbed, culminating in a over 23 million steps – the equivalent of walking from Melbourne to London and halfway back!

Teams embraced the challenge with creativity and humour – from early-morning park runs and lunchtime walks to our ever-popular Photo Bingo. Themed weeks brought smiles across the Health and Wellbeing Facebook page as members shared photos of their furry and feathered companions joining in the fun.

Step It Up reminds us that small, consistent actions add up to meaningful change. Every step taken contributes to better health, stronger connections, and a happier VICSES community.

A huge thank you to everyone who participated, shared their progress, and cheered on their teammates. Your enthusiasm and energy made this year's campaign another success.

Congratulations to our top steppers and category winners – and to everyone who took a step (or several thousand!) toward better wellbeing. ■



Trial Balance Trekkers

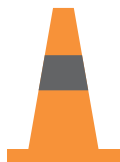


Heidelberg Hellraisers



The Ballarat Huffnpuffs

SAFETY DRIVES OUR DECISIONS



Health & Safety inspections

Nov 2023 – Oct 2024

286

Nov 2024 – Oct 2025

329

Hazards & near miss reports

Nov 2023 – Oct 2024

564

Nov 2024 – Oct 2025

526



Warragul West Gipp Coolers



Benalla Puddle Stompers



Chelsea Pace Makers



The Sunbury Trail Steppers



Wangaratta Yogis Angels

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Winning teams:

Meandering Mooses

(Large Team Category)
VICSES Moorabbin Unit

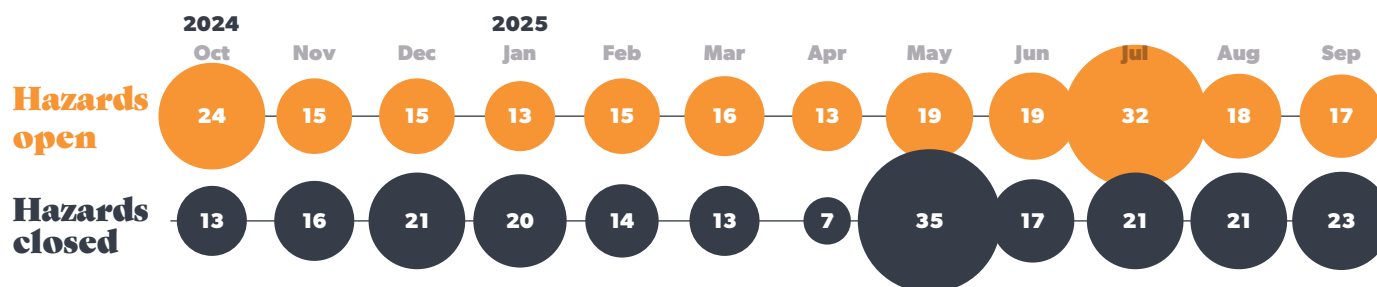
Melton Mountain Goats

(Medium Team Category)
VICSES Melton Unit

Top Gun

(Small Team Category)
VICSES Narre Warren Unit

YEAR AT A GLANCE



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Victorians encouraged to 'Drop, Cover, and Hold On' for the Great ShakeOut

By Dharni Giri, Senior Media Advisor, VHO

In October, VICSES volunteers joined students from Keysborough Secondary College and Geoscience Australia Chief Executive Officer Melissa Harris for a hands-on earthquake drill, helping the next generation of Victorians learn and practise how to 'Drop, Cover, and Hold On' ahead of the world's largest earthquake safety drill, the Great ShakeOut.

Held annually on 16 October, millions of people across the world take part in the ShakeOut, practising the simple actions that can save lives during an earthquake.

As the control agency for earthquakes in Victoria, VICSES plays a role in leading community preparedness and response when any earthquake emergency occurs.

Victoria's largest recorded earthquake, the magnitude 5.9 with an epicentre at Woods Point on 21 September 2021, caused around \$113 million in damage, with over 43,000 felt reports submitted across Victoria and neighbouring states. Volunteers responded to more than 100 calls for VICSES assistance during that event.

Despite the widespread impact, few injuries occurred, largely due to the COVID-19 lockdown in place at the time, meaning many people were indoors and away from falling debris. Analysis of felt reports from the 2021 earthquake showed that only 3.1 % of people followed

the 'Drop, Cover, and Hold On' advice, while nearly half (48.7 %) took no action.

While earthquakes are often associated with other parts of the world, Victoria experiences an average of six earthquakes greater than a magnitude 3.0 per year, and one magnitude 5.0 earthquake every five years. Additionally, the latest update to the National Seismic Hazard Assessment shows Victoria's high country has a higher earthquake risk than previously thought.

VICSES and Geoscience Australia are continuing to work together to raise awareness and improve community readiness for future earthquake events, encouraging communities to get involved and understand what to do when the ground starts to move.

The Keysborough Secondary College campus is home to one of Victoria's seismographs, operated in partnership with AuScope, providing students with a unique opportunity to learn about earthquake science and preparedness firsthand.



If you feel the ground start to shake, remember to drop to the ground onto your hands and knees, cover your head and neck with one arm and hand while taking shelter under a sturdy table or desk if possible, and hold on until the shaking stops.

Following an earthquake, and once safe, the community can submit a felt report to earthquakes.ga.gov.au to help Geoscience Australia improve national understanding of earthquake hazards and risks. ■





Victoria and New South Wales collaborate at Henty Field Days

By Glenn Mercer, Community Resilience Coordinator, Eastern Region

In September, VICSES was proud to make their debut at Henty Field Days, the biggest agricultural event in Southern Australia. Beginning in 1963, the not-for-profit event showcases the latest equipment and technology in everything from farming to camping, agribusiness, rural health and more.

The idea of attending the New South Wales (NSW) event came from Acting Deputy Chief Officer Ray Jasper, due to the significant number of Victorians in attendance each year. VICSES partnered with NSW SES throughout the three-day expo. This enabled greater collaboration across borders and paved the way for thinking about how we can nurture this collaboration at future cross-border events.

The SES activation focused on the theme Paddock to Preparedness. Through interactive displays and activities, Community Engagement Facilitators (CEFs) and Community Resilience Coordinators had meaningful engagements with almost 160 members of the community about proactive planning and preparedness for emergencies. Excitingly, three community members also expressed interest in volunteering with VICSES.

Some highlights from the activation included a visit from Her Excellency the Governor of NSW Margaret Beazley during which we spoke about the collaborative efforts of NSW SES and VICSES volunteers. We also had a conversation with a community member from Lake Buffalo

in Victoria about her experiences with floods and fires. One family from Albury talked about her emergency preparedness journey and road trauma experience. She mentioned that her family had raised funds to support the VICSES Tallangatta Unit with a new washing machine following a vehicle accident which claimed the life of her sister – a reflection on VICSES truly being a part of our communities.

‘Partnering with NSW SES at the Henty Field Days was a fantastic chance to come together, share ideas, and celebrate the innovative ways we connect with our communities. By learning from each other, we discovered new approaches to engaging the community,’ said Euroa Deputy Controller and CEF Lorretta York.

“All emergency agencies attending the Field Day rallied around the theme of preparedness, reminding visitors that being ready for the unexpected makes a real difference when disasters strike. This united message reminded families, farmers, and community members alike to take simple steps toward building resilience and staying safe,” continued Loretta.

After a successful first activation, we can’t wait to build on this at next year’s event! ■



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Young people share their story in 'We watched our river rise'

By John Bates, VICSES Essendon Unit volunteer, Western Region

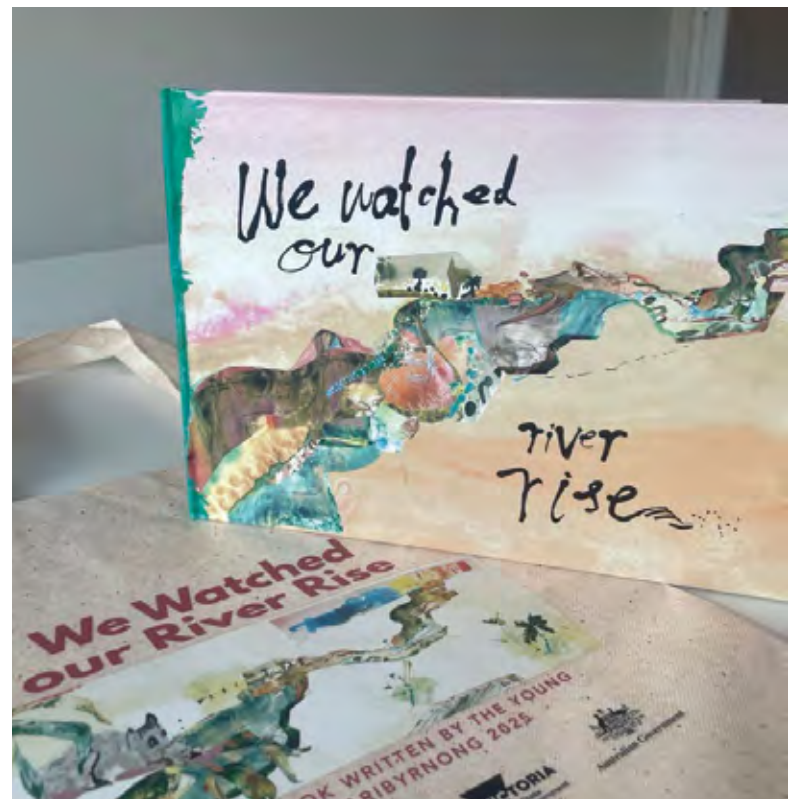
In the early hours of 14 October 2022, the Maribyrnong River in Melbourne's north-west broke through its banks, impacting over 500 properties and displacing hundreds of people. VICSES played an integral role in responding to this devastating event. Three years on, many within the community are still displaced, repairing and rebuilding their properties and their lives.

This powerful children's picture book, launched by the Maribyrnong Community Recovery Committee and Maribyrnong City Council on the third anniversary of that flood, tells the story of the October 2022 Maribyrnong floods, through the eyes of young people from the flood-affected communities.

This project was a collaboration between Maribyrnong City Council

and 100 Story Building, and was developed with child counsellors from Cohealth to create a safe environment for the young people to participate. It was delivered with funding from the Victorian and Australian governments through the Community Recovery Hubs program.

The book was inspired by the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong people's connection





to the lands and waterways of the Maribyrnong River valley and put into words by six young authors to share their experience of the floods. The story follows a baby possum who rides on its mother's back during the floods. It's a story of change, resilience and strength.

When the floods came, it wasn't just the people of Maribyrnong who were affected and displaced. So too were the plants and trees, snakes, ants, lizards and skinks, ducks and possums.

Some people left by themselves or with their neighbours, and others were helped by VICSES volunteers wearing orange uniforms and using small boats. What the baby possum saw was something it had never seen before.

Bikes and toys were scattered and floating in water and mud in the back yards of houses; families left their homes and drove away; mud covered the floors (and the little possum left lots of possum prints in the mud).

The next day, some of the people came back, and the baby possum heard so many different things. A boy said, "Cool, mud! Let's go sliding". People were asking each other if they were okay. Neighbours and strangers helped

each other clean up the houses, and some just said "What a mess!" And burst into tears.

This story is based on lived experiences. It is a story by the young people of Maribyrnong, in their own words, for the whole community. It is a story of pain and hardship, but it is also a story of great strength and the power of connection.

"The floods may have taken away our home, but it has given us a sense of community."

Copies are available to borrow from the Maribyrnong and Moonee Valley libraries. A limited number of free copies are available to local residents from the Maribyrnong Community Centre, and a PDF of the book will be available for download from the Maribyrnong City Council website. ■



Introduction: Suranga

I'm excited to have joined VICSES as the IT Administration Officer - Network within the Information Technology Department.

I bring over 18+ years of extensive experience in IT and Network Security, having worked across diverse sectors including Banking, Telecommunications, Data Centre and IT Services both in Sri Lanka and Australia. Throughout my career, I have held various roles that have equipped me with comprehensive expertise in designing, implementing, and managing enterprise-level IT infrastructure and network security solutions.

Currently, I am focused on supporting critical network operations and maintaining strong network security standards at VICSES. I worked with a variety of industry-leading technologies such as Cisco, Fortinet, Checkpoint, and SentinelOne, to ensure systems remain resilient and secure.

As I settle into this role, I'm looking forward to connecting with more VICSES members. I'm passionate about enhancing network security and infrastructure resilience and welcome opportunities to collaborate and share expertise. ■



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In 2021, Victoria experienced a magnitude 5.9 earthquake with over 35,000 felt reports.

Only 3% of people knew to

DROP,

COVER AND

HOLD ON

to stay safe.



For more information about how to plan and stay safe during an earthquake, visit our website.

