



# *Managing Emergency Services Volunteers*

Tabled 5 February 2014



## Background to the audit

- Volunteering is critical to service delivery.
- Value of volunteering is around \$16.4 billion.
- Victoria has an active volunteer workforce.
- Around 1.5 million people volunteer in Victoria.



*Factory fire at Dunlopillo Drive, Dandenong South. Photo courtesy of CFA.*



## Background to the audit

The Country Fire Authority (CFA) and the Victoria State Emergency Service (SES) are the two largest volunteer-based emergency services organisations.

### CFA

- The largest—around 57 000 volunteers.
- Operates outside of Melbourne metropolitan boundary.
- Responds to fires, bushfires and rescues, and provides fire awareness/education.



*Gravity Zone factory fire Seaford.  
Photo courtesy of CFA.*



## Background to the audit

### SES

- Around 5 000 volunteers.
- Operates across the state.
- Responds to:
  - natural disasters such as floods and storms
  - road crash rescues.
- Performs search and rescue.



*Car crashes into Berwick bakery.  
Image courtesy of CFA.*

pages  
1–6



# Audit objectives and scope

## Audit objective

To assess whether CFA and SES effectively and efficiently manage emergency services volunteers.

## Audit scope

- Planning around volunteer resource needs.
- Volunteer management around recruitment, support and retention.
- Volunteer training and education.
- Volunteer use and resource allocation.



*CFA firefighter.  
Image courtesy of CFA.*



## Conclusions

- Neither CFA nor SES has a sound understanding of the total number of volunteers it needs.
- Recruitment practices do not assure that they are addressing workforce needs.
- Both agencies' assessments of current workforce capability overestimate their ability to respond to emergencies.
- Volunteers are supported, but the reasons they leave are not well understood.
- CFA is taking action to address weaknesses, while SES has much work to do.



## Findings – Workforce planning and need

- CFA and SES have limited awareness of volunteer workforce needs.
- CFA identifies the skills it needs, rather than the minimum number of volunteers it needs.
- SES identifies the number of volunteers it needs, but the data on what it has is unreliable.
- CFA and SES routinely recruit volunteers, but this is ad hoc and not informed by organisational need.
- Absent performance frameworks limit knowledge about the effectiveness of recruitment practices.



## Findings – Volunteer training and deployment

- CFA and SES identify the skills and training needs of its volunteers.
- Training is provided, but is applied inconsistently within each organisation.
- Process weaknesses mean volunteer brigades (CFA) and units (SES) may not always have the capability they need.
- CFA and SES have unclear processes for allocating roles and deploying their volunteers.
- There is an absence of agency data on volunteer availability.



*Fire approaching.  
Image courtesy of CFA.*



## Findings – Volunteer support and retention

- CFA and SES have a range of volunteer support services.
- CFA's are guided by an overarching strategy.
- SES' are piecemeal and not linked to strategic objectives.
- CFA and SES experience volunteer turnover, although retention rates are much lower at SES.
- Neither agency has a sound understanding of the reasons why volunteers leave.



*Line markers factory fire in Dandenong South.  
Photo courtesy of CFA.*



# Recommendations

	Accept
That CFA and SES:	
1. improve their central and regional oversight of volunteer workforce management	✓
2. develop recruitment and retention strategies to guide these activities centrally	✓
3. implement risk management processes within regions, districts, brigades and units	✓
5. evaluate volunteer support systems and processes	✓
6. explore further opportunities to collaborate with each other.	✓



## Recommendations – *continued*

Accept

That CFA:

7. develop exit surveys and associated management reports based on meaningful analysis

✓

8. improve Brigade Operational Skills Profiles to reflect volunteer activity and availability.

✓

That SES:

4. review and improve data quality around volunteer numbers and skills

✓

9. improve ERAS-e profiles to reflect volunteer activity and availability

✓

10. align ERAS-e profiles with its planning cycle.

✓



## Contact details

For further information on this presentation please contact:

Victorian Auditor-General's Office

[p] 8601 7000

[w] [www.audit.vic.gov.au/about\\_us/contact\\_us.aspx](http://www.audit.vic.gov.au/about_us/contact_us.aspx)