



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

News Note

16th January 2020

BUSHFIRE RELIEF AND RECOVERY RESOURCES UPDATE #2

Information concerning bushfire relief and recovery assistance is very dynamic and frequently being updated. This News Note update provides a snapshot of current resources available to assist with member enquiries. Links to further resources can be found at the bottom of this News Note.

Emergency Financial Assistance

Emergency financial assistance is available to eligible fire-affected community members in Ararat, Alpine, Ballarat, East Gippsland, Glenelg, Golden Plains, Indigo, Mansfield, Northern Grampians, Pyrenees, Southern Grampians, Towong, Wangaratta, Wellington and Wodonga council areas.

Emergency Relief Assistance Payments

The Personal Hardship Assistance Program payments are designed to provide immediate financial help for Victorians directly impacted by the current bushfire emergency. This payment helps people directly impacted cover the cost of emergency food, accommodation, clothing, medication and personal items.

- Payments of up to \$560 per adult and \$280 per child (up to a maximum of \$1960 per eligible household).
- The payments are designed to help eligible people experiencing personal and extreme financial hardship due to the fires.
- The payments have strict eligibility requirements and are distributed via a prepaid debit card that can be used to make purchases via EFTPOS or withdraw cash from bank ATMs.
- To find out if you are eligible, visit a relief centre in the area. Go to https://www.emergency.vic.gov.au/relief/#relief_and_recovery_centres to check which relief centres are open.
- If you have relocated to Melbourne or other areas away from these relief centres you can call: 1800 961 054 (9am – 5pm, 7 days per week) for more information.

Relief payments are NOT available for:

- to cover the costs of cleaning up fallen trees or branches in people's yards
- to cover the cost of repairing fences from fallen trees. If a tree has fallen on your house, please call the SES or your local council for more information.
- to people impacted by power outages. Contact your energy distributor if you have any questions.

- Business losses or compensation for the loss of income
- the replacement of fencing
- motor vehicle repairs or towing
- paying insurance excess

Emergency Re-establishment Payments

Emergency re-establishment assistance is available if your principal place of residence (your home) is uninhabitable for more than seven days because of an emergency.

- Provides up to \$42,250 per eligible household experiencing financial hardship, who have been affected by fire at their primary place of residence.
- The grants will be available for clean-up, emergency accommodation, repairs, rebuilding (a principal place of residence), and replacing some damaged contents.
- Re-establishment assistance is available to individuals or families who do not have building (home) insurance or contents insurance.
- <https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/personal-hardship-assistance-program>

The Department of Health and Human Services is in the process of setting up a team who will begin to undertake re-establishment assessments. If you think you may be eligible for a re-establishment payment, you can speak to the payment assistance helpline 1800 961 054. They will take your details and the department will be in contact soon.

Assistance is being provided through the jointly funded Commonwealth-State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA).

Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment

People in Towong and East Gippsland Local Government areas are eligible for these payments.

- \$1000 per adult and \$400 per child
- For people who have been seriously injured, have lost their homes or whose homes have been directly damaged, or are the immediate family members of a person who has died, as a direct result of the bushfires.
- For further information, visit <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/victorian-bushfires-december-2019-australian-government-disaster-recovery-payment>

Disaster Recovery Allowance

- Up to 13 weeks income support for those who have lost income as a direct result of the bushfires
- Equivalent to Newstart or Youth Allowance
- Further information is available at: <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/victorian-bushfires-december-2019-disaster-recovery-allowance>

Personal Hardship Grants

Red Cross Emergency Grants

People who have lost homes in the 2019/2020 bushfire season can apply to Australian Red Cross for an emergency grant of \$5,000. Emergency grants are available across Australia to people whose primary place of residence has been destroyed or made uninhabitable by the fires since July 2019.

The grants are available to help bushfire-affected people to meet basic recovery needs.

- If your home has been destroyed by a bushfire, please get in touch through their website redcross.org.au/grants. You can also call 1800 RED CROSS (1800 733 276) during business hours or email grants@redcross.org.au
- The grants are part of a broader program to support people and communities affected by severe bushfires across the country. We provide psychological first aid and community support, assist people at evacuation centres, offer information and connect people to services they need.
- Recovery from disasters like bushfires can be long and complex. We know people and communities can manage their own recovery with the right support in place.

VFBV Welfare Fund

The Welfare Fund Committee have established an expedited application and approval process for any CFA volunteer who has lost their primary residence in the recent fires.



Operating since 1913, the Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria welfare Fund provides fast small grants to CFA volunteers, long serving former volunteers and their families, who are experiencing significant financial hardship. Typical cases involve prolonged illness, bereavement, loss of earnings, or the accommodation and travel costs associated with supporting a relative in hospital.

The Welfare Fund is run under Australian Tax Office rules, independently audited, and grant decisions are made by a committee of long serving CFA volunteers. The Fund has helped close to 1,200 volunteers, with more than \$1.8 million in grants made over the years.

- Grants up to \$5,000
- Available to all members and long serving ex-members and their families of subscribing Brigades
- Contact the VFBV Welfare Fund Secretary on (03) 9886 1141 or your VFBV Support Officer or State Councillor to discuss eligibility and application process.

Other Services

Financial counselling

The Rural Financial Counselling Service is available to farmers, offering free and independent financial support to primary producers and non-agriculture related small businesses.

The service can be contacted on [1300 735 578](tel:1300735578).

Financial counsellors are professionals, regulated by federal legislation and employed by not for profit community organisations. They provide information, advice and advocacy support free of charge, assisting people in dealing with life situations involving debt and hardship, dealing with creditors, and stabilising finances. The National Debt Helpline is staffed by financial counsellors and can be contacted on [1800 007 007](tel:1800007007)

Insurance

If you have property or contents insurance you should contact your insurance company as soon as possible after the fire.

- Ask your insurer for advice on actions you should take
- Do not discard or throw away damaged items without first consulting your insurance company
- Make a list of items that have been damaged and take photographs if possible
- Keep receipts for any emergency repair work

For assistance with insurance contact the Insurance Council of Australia on **1800 734 621** (24 hour hotline). You can find information on lodging a claim following a disaster here: www.disasters.org.au

Replacing documents and identification

The Australian Registries of Births, Deaths and Marriages will replace certificates that were lost in the recent bushfires, free of charge. You can call the Department of Justice on **03 5215 8500** and they will mail the forms to you.

If you've been affected by the recent fires VicRoads can:

- refund your remaining registration without any admin fees for any fire damaged vehicles or,
- replace vehicle and/or boat registration documents required for insurance claims
- replace your licence/learner permit/marine licence card for free.

Visit the VicRoads website for more information: <https://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/>

Fodder

Landholders needing emergency fodder for livestock should contact the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) on **1300 882 833** between 9am and 5pm or email fodder@vff.org.au

Superannuation

Early access on compassionate grounds: 1300 131 060

Accommodation

If you've been displaced or are helping with relief efforts, you can book free accommodation between 2 January 2020 and 16 January 2020. More information can be found on the Airbnb website <https://www.airbnb.com.au/openhomes/disaster-relief/victoriabushfires20?af=196660319&c=general> [DRR victoriabushfires20 2020Q1](#)

Banks

Westpac, Bendigo Bank, Bank of Melbourne, Bank Australia and ANZ have announced Disaster Relief Packages is available for customers who are suffering hardship as a result of the recent fires.

CommBank's Emergency Assistance Package is for customers and businesses affected by bushfires **and also to all volunteer firefighters**. The package includes loan restructuring and waiving of selected fees and charges.

Donations

Material goods are not requested at this time. Clothing and supplies is difficult to transport to fire affected areas and relief centres have been inundated with donations. The best way the public can help is by donating money to the Bushfire Disaster Appeal or to a registered not-for-profit organisation helping with the relief and recovery effort (or to a local Community Relief Fund, if established).

Bendigo Bank has established a Bushfire Disaster Appeal to support community members affected by the recent bushfires in East Gippsland and Hume.

You can donate at: <https://www.communityenterprisefoundation.com.au/make-a-donation/bushfire-disaster-appeal/>

National appeals such as the Salvation Army and Red Cross can be accessed from:

Salvation Army: <https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/donate/make-a-donation/donate-online/?appeal=disasterappeal>

Red Cross: https://www.redcross.org.au/campaigns/disaster-relief-and-recovery-new-years-eve?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=socialorganic&utm_campaign=201913_drr_disaster-relief-and-recovery_don_transient_bushfires_none

Information on how members of the public can donate to CFA Brigades can be found at: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about/supporting-cfa>

VFBV Welfare Fund Donations

VFBV delegate and officials are working with affected Brigades to access support available through the VFBV Welfare Fund. With the large number of members directly impacted, we are expecting high demand.

If Brigades and members wish to donate to the VFBV Welfare Fund they can do so by making a deposit to the following account:



Account Name:	Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria Welfare Fund
Account Number:	135 312 478
BSB Number:	633 000

If you email details of your deposit to j.laing@vfbv.com.au a receipt can be arranged.

CFA Volunteer Corporate Donations and Assistance

The following companies are offering discounts or promotions for CFA Volunteers in appreciation of your service.

Telstra will cover the cost of mobile phone bills for volunteer firefighters over the period of December and January. This is available to all volunteer firefighters registered with the official volunteer fire services within their state, such as the Country Fire Authority (CFA), the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES), and the Regional Fire Service (RFS). Additionally, if an eligible volunteer has a Pre-Paid mobile service they can instead receive 10GB of prepaid data and free calls with a 30-day expiry to their nominated Pre-Paid service number. Firefighter volunteers should contact Telstra on 13 22 03 when convenient to register for the free calls over December and January.

Optus will waive the costs of eligible volunteer firefighters' mobile services for December 2019 and January 2020. If you're an active volunteer firefighter with an Optus bill, call 1300 301 671 to see if you qualify.

Vodafone will waive any mobile network usage charges for all volunteer firefighters during December and January. To be eligible for a credit for December 2019 and January 2020 bills, Volunteers customers can call 1300 650 410 or visit a local Vodafone store and quote their official volunteer ID number and a credit for service charges will be applied to their Vodafone account.

Coles have offered a \$500 voucher to each CFA brigade. Brigades should have been provided with a unique link to claim this voucher. For further information about this donation, please contact Sally Bodman from the Communications & Stakeholders Relations directorate on 03 9262 8389 or s.bodman@cfa.vic.gov.au

AGL is offering CFA volunteers a \$150 credit on their next power or gas bill. The offer is open to current and new AGL customers who volunteer with CFA. To access this offer, call 13 12 45. The customer service centres are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Alinta Energy is offering \$200 credit to be applied to your Alinta Energy account. Simply fill out an enquiry form and they will get in contact with you with the details or call them on 13 37 02. Please make sure to choose "Volunteer Firefighter" as the Enquiry type and include your Alinta Energy Customer Account Number and your Volunteer ID Number for the state fire service you are a part of.

MEMBER WELFARE AND SUPPORT

Support services are available to provide you additional support:

CFA WELLBEING SUPPORT LINE

1800 959 232

Providing CFA members and their immediate family access to 24 hour support 7 days a week.
Psychologists – Counsellors – Peer Support - Chaplains

Lifeline: 13 11 14 - provides crisis support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636 - to talk with a trained mental health professional.

Further Resources

EMV: http://www.emergency.vic.gov.au/relief/#financial_assistance

CFA Donations: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/donate1>

Offers Available to Members:

<https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/Show?pagelD=BushfireSupportAssistance>