

# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & EDUCATION > BUSHFIRE-READY NEIGHBOURHOODS NEWSLETTER



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## Helping Tasmanian communities work together to prevent, prepare and respond to bushfires.

In this issue we look at the wonderful work our TFS and SES volunteers undertake in their community. This edition features:

- TFS volunteering Community Engagement Toolkit
- Small-scale community engagement
- Cambridge Fire Brigade community engagement
- Tasman Peninsula fire quiz night
- Railton Brigade combines community engagement with triage exercise
- Tarooma engagement – lessons learnt
- Central Coast SES Unit open day.

## TFS Volunteering Community Engagement Toolkit

The feedback from the TFS Volunteer Community Engagement Officers has helped the Community Development and Education team to improve resources for volunteers to increase their engagement in fire safety. There is now a section on the Conexus TFS Volunteer Portal featuring the Community Engagement Toolkit.

The online toolkit includes:

- Community Engagement Essentials – a collection of fact sheets to get you and your brigade started in the community engagement space.
- How to Plan and Run – a quick and easy guide on how to plan and run various types of community activities and events, starting off with street meetings.
- Community Engagement Webinar series – view the range of 2020 community engagement topics that were requested by TFS volunteers.

If there is something you would like in the toolkit, get in contact with your regional Community Development Officer by emailing [communityed@fire.tas.gov.au](mailto:communityed@fire.tas.gov.au)

Useful links for TFS volunteers undertaking community engagement include:

- [TFS Community Engagement](#) group on Facebook
- Conexus Volunteer Community Engagement Toolkit <http://conexus/dpfem.tas.gov.au/tfs/vp/toolkit>



The TFS Community Engagement Toolkit also includes various signage and banners volunteers can borrow for community events.

- TFS Bushfire-Ready Neighbourhoods webpage [bushfirereadyneighbourhoods.tas.gov.au](http://bushfirereadyneighbourhoods.tas.gov.au).

Planning is already underway for the 2022 Community Engagement Workshops.

If you would like to learn more about community engagement for your brigade, contact the TFS Community Development and Education team at [communityed@fire.tas.gov.au](mailto:communityed@fire.tas.gov.au) or 1800 000 699.

Selina Young  
Community Development Officer, South



## Small-scale community engagement

There are over 230 volunteer brigades in Tasmania. Some are large, with active members who are interested in community engagement, while others are quite small with limited resources and little member support. But no matter what the dynamics of your brigade, even if it is just you, or one or two members, there are still ways you can engage effectively with your local community.

It is fantastic when we get great public response to community engagement events, and some brigades are coming up with exciting and innovative ideas, but it is not always feasible to organise and coordinate large events. So, whether you are a small brigade, or a larger brigade between events, what are some opportunities where you can pass on the bushfire-ready message?

- **Join an event** – if your local area hosts annual events such as an agricultural show, approach the organisers and offer to set up a community engagement fire information booth. Or simply pop on your uniform, grab some brochures and hang out at the weekly community market for an hour or so and chat with the locals.
- **Value-add** – community members who contact your brigade about burn-offs offer a great opportunity to value-add. These community members are already engaged and aware of fire risk, so they might be open to inviting you back to undertake a property assessment or perhaps host a Bushfire-Ready Neighbourhood event.
- **Be visible** – whether it is through regularly updating your brigade social media or a pop-up community event in the carpark of the local supermarket, be visible.



*Mountain River bushfire-ready property assessment workshop*

Get the community used to seeing you around so they feel comfortable about approaching you and seeking advice.

- **Run a property assessment** – a popular event with community members is a property assessment. Most property owners want to learn how to better prepare their property to survive a bushfire event. If you are struggling to secure hosts for a property assessment, try asking your neighbours, family and friends if they are interested, or your brigade could host the event and hold a property assessment at the station.

Large brigade or small, we can all make a difference. Seize every opportunity and have fun doing it.

*Suzie Gifford, Grove Volunteer Fire Brigade*

## Cambridge Fire Brigade community engagement

There are a few key things that underpin our brigade's approach to community engagement:

- Our relationships with the community
- Knowing our response area, the community and any challenges that they may have
- Community engagement and setting realistic expectations
- Highlighting TFS and our brigade's capabilities
- Building the relationship and establishing trust.

Our brigade has built up a good reputation in the local community. This is helped by the long history of the brigade (est. 1968) and a lot of long-term local members,

meaning we are well known and familiar to the residents.

We have tried to understand the unique challenges that exist in the Mount Rumney and Cambridge area through several local organisations such as Landcare, the Clarence Council and other community organisations and local businesses.

We always aim to be respectful but blunt and honest with our discussions at property field days. This has been important in having those difficult conversations with the community, especially for the well-meaning but less-informed newer residents who don't understand the realities of living in an isolated bush setting. We explain that we can't have a fire truck in every driveway. The preparation residents do now will help both them and firefighters to defend their homes.

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## Tasman Peninsula fire quiz night

*Our Challenge: The year 2020 and COVID-19 dominates the news, a new fire season approaches, the bush has grown back since the Dunalley fires seven years ago, and the community is becoming complacent. We want and need residents to have a plan for their safety and remove hazards, so we need to engage them!*

In 2020 there were restricted opportunities for people to get together and major community events had been cancelled. We saw a quiz night as a tool for groups of friends to come together, so we went for it. Our action was to plan for a quiz night with all the questions related to fire. The night was not a fundraiser and a minimal charge covered the venue hire and food. All the prizes were relevant to the topic, being fire extinguishers, fire blankets, protective equipment and smoke alarms.

The local Rotary Club was the host who hired the hall, did the catering, covered the insurance and event liquor licence, and collected the money. The Rural Youth group did the quiz runner roles, collecting answer sheets and serving food, and the local school music students provided entertainment in the supper break.

The COVID-19 rules meant movement had to be restricted, and bringing food to the table and having entertainment reduced people's desire to mingle extensively. Tables were spaced according to the rules in a large hall.

Koonya Volunteer Fire Brigade members were the quiz masters and ran the logistics for the questions and answers. An adjudicator aided in the variations and interpretations



*First round fire quiz night winners*

of responses, and the answers to quiz questions were explained to increase people's learning about fire.

The quiz night was advertised via local shops, newsletters and Facebook and brigade members spread the word through their workplaces and networks. Participants flooded in and we had to put a limit on the event to 100 people.

Much effort went into question design, so each had a learning point. There was variation between common knowledge, trivial facts, surprise and discussion. The last group of questions was a survey of opinions to guide our future fire safety community engagement activities.

Planning has begun for the 2021 quiz night. Commendations to the Tasman Peninsula Rotary Club, Rural Youth, Tasman District School and the Koonya Volunteer Fire Brigade for a successful community engagement activity.

*Koonya Volunteer Fire Brigade Community Engagement Working Group*

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## Cambridge Fire Brigade community engagement

Residents ask our advice looking for answers about bushfire safety. So, we come prepared to use real life situations and our personal experiences to build a picture. Everyone has their own idea of what it would be like, but we try to set them straight as to what to expect (bushfires are scary, loud, smoky and dangerous).

The challenge for us as a brigade now is getting residents to take action on hazard reduction. We feel that residents could and should be doing a lot more on their own properties, but many of the newer residents seem to lack the necessary understanding, knowledge and skills. This may affect their motivation.



*Mt Rumney property field day event*

A lot of these factors might not be unique to our situation and we hope there are some useful takeaways for other brigades in how we have done things.

*Matt Fenton and Tony Schultz, Cambridge Fire Brigade*





*Buelah, Latrobe, Tarleton and Railton brigades assemble for the triage exercise*

## Railton Brigade combines community engagement with a triage exercise

For some time, our brigade has been concerned about the bushfire risk of properties backing onto bushland or grassland around Railton. In October 2019, the brigade conducted a triage exercise near Goliath Park on the western side of Railton with the aim of:

- Familiarising neighbouring brigades with potential offensive, defensive and backstop situations
- Identifying hazards surrounding and encumbering properties backing onto bushland
- Promoting bushfire preparedness to local residents
- Giving residents the opportunity to discuss bushfire preparedness with a brigade member.

In the lead-up to the triage exercise, information packs were hand-delivered to 29 houses that backed onto bushland or grassland in the area. These packs contained information on bushfire plans, home fire escape plans, smoke alarms, and fire safety games for kids. A cover letter explained that the purpose of the joint brigade activity was for brigade members to familiarise themselves with local properties.

The following week five crews from the Buelah, Latrobe, Tarleton and Railton brigades assembled for the triage exercise. Each crew was assigned six properties to assess, with two members of each crew to take the street front and two people to take the bushland at the back of each property. Crew leaders were given a checklist

for each property with various questions such as type of construction, roofing, availability of access to the rear of the property (and neighbouring properties), distance of water supply, hazards, and anything else worth noting. Crews were asked to classify each property on whether the owner could defend it, whether a crew could defend it or whether it was undefendable.

This exercise provided valuable pre-incident planning information for the brigades, with 11 houses being marked undefendable, two houses found to have fuse boxes blocked by porches, and one house with 415 volts. Crews also had lengthy discussions with four households during the exercise. The 11 undefendable properties were sent a letter offering a visit from a Railton brigade member to follow up with the safety concerns and six households took up this opportunity. A further five properties that were not involved in the exercise have now asked for a visit to triage their houses.

The triage exercise enabled the brigades involved to increase their response preparedness. By building in a community engagement approach, it also provided an opportunity to encourage residents to prepare a bushfire plan and prepare their property. It provided an opportunity to build the profile of the responding brigades, and the residents were able to ask bushfire and home fire safety questions directly to brigade members.

*Ross Crack, Railton Brigade Chief*





# Taroona engagement – lessons learnt

The Taroona Volunteer Fire Brigade was recently invited to present at the southern 2021 Community Engagement Workshop and talk about our experiences with lower case sessions and the lessons we learnt.

In 2020 the brigade ran three pop-up sessions over three weeks at various locations around the Taroona area. The week before our first session we had Selina, the southern Community Development Officer, run a refresher session for the crew with topics about property preparedness, Alerts and Warnings and the local Community Protection Plan. This got everyone up to speed with their bushfire knowledge.

Our lessons learnt and points to consider when running a pop-up session:

- Check out the intended area and consider factors like parking, traffic volume and room to put up a small display where people could walk around safely.
- Timing – we chose Tuesday evenings, our training night, from 6pm to 7pm and during the daylight-saving period. We also figured that most people would be available around this time.
- Advertising – this is very important and must be planned out. This will ensure you will get decent numbers turning up to your discussions. How did we go about it? We tapped into the local community group via Facebook and left a message every week to ensure we were always near the top of the page. Our notices informed the public of our sessions and where and when they were going to be held.
- We borrowed banners from the TFS. They were placed near where our event was going to be held, usually sited on the day of the event and in the morning.
- We used corflute signs and located them around high-volume traffic areas like dog parks and playgrounds.
- Letter-boxing was used with DL sized leaflets (8.5”x3.9”). Use this size because it makes slotting the leaflet into a letterbox efficient.
- Letter-boxing was done a couple of days before each session, concentrating on the areas where the sessions were going to be held. The local politician was more than happy to print them up. Taroona needed 1,400 leaflets.



Taroona Brigade getting ready for a pop-up session



Pop-up session

In conclusion we had over 200 people turn up to our sessions and the feedback we received was very positive.

Stephen Watchorn  
First Officer Taroona Volunteer Fire Brigade



# Central Coast SES Unit open day

The Central Coast SES Unit, based in Ulverstone, decided to hold an open day to educate the public as to what SES does and the type of skills SES members are trained in. It was also an opportunity for units that do not have a 'public face' to showcase their work and create possible recruitment opportunities. This included the Incident Management Unit (IMU) and Search and Rescue (SAR).

During the planning stage we communicated with these other units about getting involved. Planning involved a lot of communication with regional staff and other member units to make sure we were working within SES policies because this was the first of its kind for SES in our region.

The open day was held in May with messages about preparing for floods in the lead-up to winter. SES has some educational and promotional resources that we used, such as home emergency plans, flood and storm factsheets, flood jars, pens, stickers, magnets and wristbands as well as Paddy Platypus and the kids' activity books. We approached the Ulverstone APEX club, who were happy to run a BBQ on site. We also ran a social media campaign which in the end reached over 2,000 people.

The day's activities included:

- Live Road Crash Rescue (RCR) demonstrations
- Mock rooftop repairs using the rooftop safety system
- Flood awareness and emergency kits
- Kids' showbags
- Sandbagging stand for kids to get involved
- Chainsaw display stand
- Incident Management Unit command bus
- Search and Rescue unit display
- Paddy the Platypus also made an appearance for the kids.

Overall, the open day was a great success; we gained a large amount of exposure in our local community. We estimate around 50 to 60 members of the public attended the day, including our municipal Mayor.



Central Coast SES Unit with Paddy the Platypus

After the open day we identified some things we would do differently next time. We will review the engagement material for Road Crash Rescue demonstrations and involve other emergency services for larger demonstrations. It is important to reach more people, so next time we will arrange more media coverage by getting a local radio station on board, and consider other venues such as the local park on the waterfront to provide a more public presence. We also realised there is a need for more emphasis on community engagement across the organisation and for an appropriate resource framework to be developed. We plan to work with regional staff and other parts of SES to develop a Community Engagement Planning Framework for future events.

Tim Wilson, Central Coast SES Unit

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