

Project Firefighters

Designated
roles for
Aboriginal
people



We are committed in recruiting Aboriginal people who want to work on Country to help protect Victorian communities from bushfires by becoming seasonal firefighters as part of Forest Fire Management Victoria crews.

Each year we employ field-based seasonal firefighters to assist with planned burning and the prevention and suppression of bushfires in parks and forests.

It's a job where no two days are the same. Seasonal firefighting is a great way to contribute, be challenged, work as part of a team and develop career pathways in an organisation that supports the Self-determination of Aboriginal people.

A significant pool of positions are made available using provisions of the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*, whereby only Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people are eligible to apply. Applicants will be required to provide a completed Aboriginality form, which can be found on our website.

What is Forest Fire Management Victoria?

Forest Fire Management Victoria crews are made up of firefighters from DELWP and Parks Victoria including rangers from Traditional Owner organisations. These crews work in partnership with other emergency agencies to prevent and suppress bushfires in Victoria's national parks and state forests. Our crews also support the CFA to fight fires on private land.

Becoming part of Victoria's firefighting team means you can be part of protecting Victorian communities on Country from the threat of bushfire.

What is Project Firefighter (PFF) employment?

We employ several hundred project firefighters, on a full-time basis for a fixed term each year, at more than 80 locations around Victoria. PFFs help suppress bushfires and assist in prevention works, including planned burning. We train three categories of PFFs each year:

- Firefighters (including positions designated for Aboriginal people)
- Fire Support Officers (limited positions)
- Rappel crews (limited positions)

What do I need to do to become a PFF?

These positions would suit people who are sound decision makers, community minded, looking for a unique challenge and want to work on Country.

All preferred applicants will be required to undertake pre-employment screening, including:

- A declaration and consent form
- A National Police Check
- Medical Assessment
- Task Based Assessment.

If offered a role you are required to provide a completed Aboriginality form or provide a copy of one you already have. Applicants that successfully complete these will then proceed to General Firefighter Training.



The hours of work needed to control fires are unpredictable. As a firefighter you must be prepared to be available for standby for an immediate return to work during the employment period. A maximum 20-minute response time is preferred.

PFFs can be deployed to any location across Victoria and are provided with accommodation on these occasions.

All PFFs receive comprehensive initial training and must become accredited general firefighters to remain employed.

All successful candidates are provided with a contract detailing conditions of employment. DELWP PFFs will be employed by DELWP under the current Field Staff Agreement. Parks Victoria PFFs are employed by Parks Victoria under the current Parks Victoria Workplace Determination.

Overalls, safety boots, safety helmets and other personal equipment is provided for use during employment and must be worn.

PFFs are required to maintain a level of fitness based on the requirements of their job.



What are the working conditions for a firefighter?

A general firefighter needs to be prepared to:

- work as part of a team,
- work in a wide range of outdoor, potentially stressful, environments for extended periods (including overnight),
- perform a variety of physical tasks including using hand tools, power tools and lifting and carrying equipment,
- work in environments where you may be exposed to heat, smoke, dust, chemicals, high levels of noise, limited visibility and limited mobility, wear personal protective equipment provided,
- travel in/operate vehicles and machinery in a variety of terrains, day or night for extended periods and sometimes travel in aircraft,
- travel to other parts of Victoria and interstate and work and camp in remote locations for extended periods,
- use senses (sight, sound, touch) to help make decisions, and maintain personal safety



What work is performed by a firefighter?

A general firefighter works to reduce the risk of fire, contains fire outbreaks and manages environmental effects by:

- participating in fire suppression activities like rake hoeing, hand clearing vegetation, using pumps, blacking out stumps, using water to extinguish fire,
- working with communities to help maintain awareness of our firefighting activities,
- minimising the spread of fire by back burning, grading, slashing and cutting vegetation,
- participating in vehicle, plant and equipment maintenance for fire preparedness and suppression activities,
- operating equipment, plant and vehicles in accordance with their role, training and accreditation.

Apart from fire suppression a firefighter is required to undertake:

- various fire training activities
- fire protection works i.e. slashing, clearing tracks and culverts, planned burning operations
- maintenance of facilities and equipment, and
- road construction and general field work in forests and parks
- planned burn heritage assessments

How long are PFFs employed?

The period of employment for PFFs is generally from around November/December until the end of March. Some positions may commence earlier and be extended until the end of May to assist with the planned burning program.

At the end of each fire season, three year contracts may be offered, subject to annual seasonal PFF requirements. These contracts will have a fixed term of employment for each season (generally 26 weeks or 34 weeks).



Skills required

All firefighters

- Require a current manual drivers licence
- Have an ability to work safely and effectively in a team
- Have an ability to follow verbal and written instructions
- Take initiative to seek information to solve problems and proactively look for things to do
- Maintain adequate fitness levels
- Maintain self-discipline, resilience and flexibility

Other skills and experience that are advantageous are:

- Bush/grass land firefighting
- A current first aid certificate
- Construction induction training
- Chainsaw operation accreditation
- Using tools, brushcutters, pole saws, small pumps
- Using field radios and other communication equipment
- Map reading, navigation and orientation skills
- Driving 4WD vehicles and heavy vehicles
- Operating bulldozers and heavy machinery
- Skill or experience in forestry, parks or rural works.

Tyson's firefighting journey

Tyson's firefighting journey has been influenced by hearing stories from his father, who has worked in parks and forests for around 15 years.

If I was to summarise this in one word, it would be 'positive'.

He describes the role as diverse, saying that as a bush firefighter, you're always learning new skills. This includes everything from using a chainsaw and heavy machinery, clearing tracks and protecting the community.

'You're always doing something different every day,' Tyson says.

Working in the Grampians region, he adds that he is driven by the idea of helping to safeguard the community and the natural environment from bushfire.

'I am very proud to do that.'



Tom's firefighting journey

Tom is one of our firefighters based in the Otways District, working out of our Gellibrand depot.

He has been with us for two years now and has become an integral part of the team.

'I have really enjoyed the PFF role because of the variety it has offered and the pathways it opens for the future.'

'Getting the opportunity to work in the outdoors in the Otways has shown me the best our local area has to offer, while providing the chance to go on deployments all around the state from an angle most people don't get the chance to.'

'I'm grateful for the lessons I have learnt and that have allowed me to connect with my culture in ways that I never expected, also opening career pathways for my future in the department.'



Cultural burning

We have been integrating cultural burning into our fuel management program. These burns are nominated and led by Traditional Owners, with our support.

Victorian Traditional Owners have strong aspirations to ensure cultural use of fire is re-introduced, adapted and applied to allow healing and caring for Country.

Cultural burning is a practice that has been going on for thousands of years to enhance the health of the land and its people. It is generally mosaic in nature, cooler burning and sometimes done at night.

These burns usually have multiple objectives including protection of cultural or natural assets, ceremony, regeneration and management of food, fibre and medicines, fauna habitat protection, fuel reduction and healing Country's spirit.

We are committing to continuing this work, including helping implement The Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Fire Strategy developed by the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owners Corporation.



Mick's story

Mick is a proud Yorta Yorta and Dja Dja Wurrung man. He has been heavily involved in our cultural burns and planning – including the first Loddon Mallee region cultural burn in 2017 on Dja Dja Wurrung country for about 170 years.

"Change is happening, and we are getting mob out on Country. I've been able to do this with my family – my wife, my cousins, my elders. It's been deadly."

"It helps support self-determination for Traditional Owners. It is about walking together."

What about health and fitness?

Our firefighters are required to have a high level of fitness and be in excellent health, as firefighting is very strenuous and requires more strength and endurance than other work activities. People who are regularly involved in sporting activities or manual work, are more likely to meet the requirements for this type of employment. The rappel fitness test is slightly different to that used for standard PFF positions. This reflects the different, and often more rigorous work, undertaken by rappel crews.

How are medical and fitness levels determined?

Medical Assessment

Part of the firefighter selection process is a specific firefighter medical assessment. Our medical provider will test your hearing, vision, lung function and range of movement, as well as general health. The test may take up to 1.5 hours.

Employment as a firefighter is not recommended for people with serious cardiovascular, neurological or respiratory conditions, or who are obese. You are encouraged to contact our medical provider if you have any queries.

Their details and more specific information about allergies, anaphylaxis and chronic medical conditions are available on our website.

Fitness Assessment

Part of the firefighter selection process is the Task Based Assessment (TBA). A successful assessment is required for employment as a PFF. TBAs do not simulate fire conditions such as heat, smoke and dust but they are used to ensure that employees have the range of physical fitness required to fight fires. These do not alter for age, race or gender, making it fair and equitable for all applicants.

All applicants for PFF roles must undertake the pack hike test. Those applying for the role of rappel crew are required to also undertake the circuit test.

The pack hike test

The pack hike test assesses fitness ability. It is a test of aerobic fitness and muscular endurance. Participants must wear appropriate footwear and clothing to complete the test. Footwear should have a tread sole, such as hiking boots or runners/sports shoes. Open styles of footwear such as thongs and sandals are not permitted. Approved clothing includes loose fitting long or short sleeve shirts, long or short pants. Singlets and sleeveless shirts are not permitted. Hats and sunglasses should be worn for additional sun protection.

Who must complete the pack hike test?

All categories of PFFs, including rappel, must successfully complete the pack hike test to be considered for employment. Following the successful completion of the pack hike test, rappel crew candidates can progress to the circuit test.

What does the pack hike test involve?

For PFFs to successfully complete the pack hike test, they must walk 4.83 kilometres on a level track carrying a weight of 20.4 kilogram within 38 to 45 minutes. Participants who weigh 68 kilograms or less are eligible to carry a lesser weight of 15.4 kilograms.

Rappel crews must carry a weight of 20.4 kilograms and complete the pack hike within 38 to 42.5 minutes.

The circuit test

The circuit is a test that assesses a person's ability to perform tasks specific to rappel operations.

Rappel applicants must successfully complete the circuit to be considered for employment.

The circuit test involves two components, including:

- Lift and carry a 30 kilogram pack, five times over a distance of 15 metres
- Lift a 30 kilogram pack ten times to a height of 1.2 metres.

How do I get fit to be a firefighter?

Before you start

You should check with your doctor before commencing any new fitness training program or dramatically increasing the one you are currently involved in if you:

- are over 40 years of age
- have experienced faintness, light-headedness or blackouts
- have experienced unusual heartbeats such as skipped beats or palpitations
- have ever been told that your blood pressure is abnormal
- have high cholesterol
- have ever had heart trouble or a heart attack
- have a family history of heart problems
- have any major illnesses.

Make sure that any program that you undertake has warm up, conditioning and cool down phases.

Remember

- Never exercise if you're feeling unwell or in pain
- Stop any exercise that causes pain immediately, and see a doctor
- Keep a record of what you have achieved with goals set along the way.

Also always check your heart rate while you are exercising. As a guide, in training your heart rate should be around 75 per cent of the maximum, which can be calculated by:
 $(220 - \text{age}) \times .75 = \text{training heart rate}.$

The recommended minimum number and length of training sessions are:

- 30 minutes, two to three per week to maintain fitness
- 30 minutes, four per week to increase fitness.

Training for the pack hike test

The best way to train for the pack hike test is to take a staged approach. Start by walking the pace required, even if you only walk 1/2 or 1/3 of the total distance to begin, i.e. walk 1,610 metres in 15 minutes. Progress to 2,415 metres in 22.5 minutes. Then to 4,830 metres in 45 minutes. Then in the same pattern, slowly add weight to the pack. If you are unable to increase the weight an increase of five per cent in gradient is equal to five kilograms, so try walking up hills.

Always make sure that you are wearing a suitable pack and that it is adjusted correctly, with the weight placed high on the back and close to the body. The wearing of a pack while walking at this pace has been known to cause friction burns in the lower back, armpits and hip points. Make sure clothing is not bunched, has no seams in these areas and stop and re-adjust your pack and load should you feel any discomfort.

Training for the circuit

The circuit is a series of tasks requiring a combination of muscle endurance and muscle strength. A general weight training program covering all muscle groups is the best recommendation for training.

Remember to always train with care

Any information provided in this brochure is only a general guide. Your ability to pass these tests will depend on your fitness level.

How to become a PFF?

Applications must be completed online at:
jobs.careers.vic.gov.au/pff

For more information you can:

- Contact your local DELWP or Parks Victoria office
- **Contact the Aboriginal Employment and Cultural Strategy team on aboriginal.employment@delwp.vic.gov.au (for general enquiries on Aboriginal employment)**
- Contact the DELWP Customer Service Centre on 136 186
- For more information on forest firefighting, visit ffm.vic.gov.au



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