INFORMATION
for volunteers thinking of joining the
Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service (VFRS)
The Fire and Emergency Services Authority
The Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia (FESA) was formed in 1999 to provide more effective and efficient coordination and cooperation among Western Australia’s emergency services.

FESA is made up of the following divisions and portfolios:
- Operational Services:
  - Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service
  - Career Fire and Rescue Service
  - Bush Fire Brigades
  - State Emergency Service
  - Volunteer Marine Rescue Services;
- Strategic Policy and Executive Services;
- Community Development;
- Corporate Services;
- Emergency Management WA;
- Executive Services; and
- Office of CEO.

The structure of FESA
FESA is a Government statutory authority and it reports to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

As a statutory authority, FESA has a Chairperson and a Board appointed by the Minister. The FESA CEO works with the Board to set the strategic direction of the organisation, provide advice to the Minister and to oversee all of FESA's operations and functions.

The Fire and Rescue Service is within FESA's Operational Services Division and deals specifically with fire emergencies “within the Gazetted Fire Districts” or state-wide for the special risks of hazardous materials response (Hazmat) or road crash rescue incidents.

Volunteer Fire Brigades
FESA supports different types of brigades or units which volunteer firefighters can join:
- Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service Brigades formed under the powers of the Fire Brigades Act 1942.
- Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades formed by Local Governments under the powers of the Bush Fires Act 1954.
- Private Fire Brigades established under the Fire Brigades Act 1942.
INFORMATION FOR VOLUNTEERS THINKING OF JOINING THE VOLUNTEER FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE (VFRS)

FESA Values

FESA is a progressive, values-driven organisation. We place great importance on people. Living our values and strong leadership are integral to the way we work with each other and the community for a safer Western Australia. We use our values to guide our behaviour and our decision making. Living our values is the responsibility of everyone within FESA. FESA has seven value sets:

**Our Values**

- Put the community first.
- Work together as a committed team.
- Respect and value each other.
- Continuously improve our services.
- Act with integrity and honesty.
- Have open and honest two-way communications.
- Strive to keep ourselves and others safe.
Other agencies/operational services you may work with

On the fireground, you may find other agencies assisting at incidents. The most common agencies will be the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) and FESA’s State Emergency Service (SES).

**DEC**

DEC firefighters wear bright green overalls with yellow reflective tape at the wrist, ankle, and bottom border of the jacket and across their back.

DEC provides broad conservation and land management services to the WA community including:

- Conservation of ecosystems and native flora and fauna species; land and wildlife management plans; recovery programs for threatened species.
- Protection of WA’s wildlife from illegal exploitation; emergency actions (e.g. marine animal rescue).
- Protection of natural ecosystems from degradation by fire; protection of people and facilities on DEC-managed and adjacent lands from fire; protection of forest resources from fire and disease; protection of native plants and animals from disease, feral predators and pests.
- Management of national, marine, regional and conservation parks for conservation and recreation; management of State forests for conservation, tourism and recreation, water catchment and timber production.

**State Emergency Service (SES)**

You may also see members of FESA’s State Emergency Service (SES) on the fireground. They provide operational support to firefighters. State Emergency Service personnel wear orange overalls.

FESA SES provides a wide range of services to help cope with the effects of natural disasters from emergency repairs on buildings, to restoration of essential services and ferrying cargo and passengers across flood waters.

SES volunteers also carry out searches (which can involve tracker dogs and horseback searchers) and cliff and cave rescues. They also assist in air search operations at times. In some areas within WA, SES assumes the responsibility for extricating people from vehicles involved in road crash accidents.

Many SES volunteers also work behind the scenes in operational support at incidents as radio or computer operators, in administration or incident control, planning or logistics.

**WA Police**

WA Police Officers provide essential support to firefighters and other FESA volunteers working in close collaboration with volunteer firefighters during fires and other emergencies. Police Officers also:

- control crowds at emergencies;
- establish and maintain road blocks and exclusions zones;
- work with FESA Fire Investigators to establish the origin and cause of fires;
- provide advice to firefighters when a crime scene is established and evidence needs to be protected during an the extinguishing of a fire; and
- act in the capacity they have the legislative power for and seek support from FESA firefighters to carry out those duties.
The Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service (VFRS)

Thinking about joining a VFRS Brigade?

The Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service (VFRS) of Western Australia is dedicated to serving the Western Australian community in fire prevention, fire suppression, emergency rescue and hazardous materials response.

Your commitment to becoming a volunteer firefighter is greatly appreciated by the community and your fellow team members. As a volunteer firefighter, you will gain satisfaction and personal rewards through developing skills that will assist you in all facets of emergency operations and prevention risk management.

Volunteers within the FRS play a significant and vital role in ensuring that the communities in which they dwell are safe places to work, live and play. Whether it is carrying out risk management activities, fire prevention activities, fighting a fire, teaching fire safety education to school children, working with local residents to improve their own personal safety or responding to road crash rescue, the activities and learning skills required to manage these new directions can be extremely exciting and challenging.

The VFRS offers you an opportunity to gain and use a wide variety of skills in your role as a Volunteer Firefighter. By further developing and enhancing expertise in such domains as business, interpersonal and organisational skills, it may improve your role in the workplace or stand you in good stead for future employment opportunities. You will face new challenges in the work you undertake within the VFRS and will also further develop important skills such as teamwork and leadership in your role as a volunteer.

Initially, with the assistance of your team mates and brigade Captain, you may be given the option to undertake an induction process which may be formally delivered or self-paced. New members must then complete some mandatory training that is based on the Brigade’s operational profile, with the option to complete other elective training programs. It is important however, to remember that FESA is a learning organisation and that during your volunteer service there will be many opportunities to gain skills across a wide range of competencies.
FESA has a number of District/Area Managers supporting volunteer brigades and they are based in the following locations:
- Albany
- Broome
- Bunbury
- Esperance
- Fremantle
- Geraldton
- Joondalup
- Kalgoorlie
- Karratha
- Kununurra
- Mandurah
- Manjimup
- Midland
- Narrogin
- Northam
- Port Hedland.

What your brigade expects of you

There are a range of duties that your brigade will expect you to carry out. These are:
- follow instructions;
- respond to incidents;
- attend training;
- use the brigade’s equipment and vehicles in a safe manner;
- carry out your duties in a safe and professional manner;
- demonstrate a commitment to FESA’s vision, mission and values;
- work effectively with other agencies; and
- maintain a reasonable level of physical fitness.

Performing these activities assists in enhancing your community’s safety.

Follow instructions

The work you undertake as a firefighter will often entail carrying out tasks that determine whether people are put at risk or remain safe, and whether property is destroyed or saved. The Officer in Charge (OIC)/Incident Controller is someone who makes decisions based on practical experience and training—often gained over a long period of time. Your job is to carry out those instructions and keep your OIC informed of any changes in the situation that may affect his/her strategy.
In many cases at all types of operational incidents the dynamics are very real. The OIC/Incident Controller cannot be everywhere at once and firefighters are his/her eyes and ears for that part of the fireground where they are operating. Communication on the fireground is essential for safe and efficient incident management.

When your OIC/Incident Controller gives you a task, confirm the task and carry it out according to instructions. It is your responsibility to follow safe work practices and procedures. Examples of safe work practices include:

- using Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) appropriate to the task;
- following the guidelines for avoiding heat stress;
- maintaining communication with other members of your crew;
- using all your senses to keep in touch with changing conditions;
- reporting relevant changes affecting all operational areas to your OIC/Incident Controller;
- taking note of refuge areas; and
- assist in keeping other team members safe.

Responding to incident calls

In many areas of Western Australia, your brigade is the only response to a fire or accident that many people will get! Your brigade will expect you to make every effort to attend to calls for assistance in a timely and professional manner. The range of calls that a brigade may receive include:

- structural (building) fires;
- bush fires;
- car fires;
- incidents that involve flammable materials; and
- support to other emergency services.
- hazardous materials (Hazmat) incidents;
- road crash rescue incidents; and
- other rescues (such as from collapsed buildings).

Attend training

Ongoing practical training is essential if you are going to continue to develop as a competent firefighter. Firefighters are to attend and fully participate in training sessions. You will have many opportunities to attend training held at your brigade. Your brigade training officer or District/Area Manager will coordinate training and may also conduct sessions. This training is valuable, as it will cover local conditions and give you the opportunity to learn from the experiences of others.

Formal training courses will be made available to you through your local training officer or Regional Office. Neighbouring brigades may attend, giving you the opportunity to get to know other volunteers that you will see on the fireground.

The amount of training that you undertake will, in most cases, depend on the risks within your region, and how active you are within your brigade. You may wish to complete more advanced training courses as your level of experience and competency increases.
Carry out your duties in a professional manner
It is important to remember that you represent not only your brigade but all FESA brigades. You are expected to behave in a professional manner at all times, especially when working with the public.

Demonstrate a commitment to FESA’s vision, mission and values
The Fire and Emergency Service Authority (FESA) has developed a range of community safety programs and policy statements, including Standing Operational Procedures (SOPs).

Work effectively with other agencies
It is becoming more common for brigades to work with other agencies such as the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC), WA Police and St John Ambulance. Officers, firefighters and members from other services deserve your respect, and it is expected that you will work effectively together as a committed team as required.

Maintain your personal fitness
Firefighting is strenuous work! You should be fit enough to undertake physical work on a summer’s day for six hours, dressed in personal protective equipment (PPE)—clothing, helmet, gloves and boots.
Regular brisk walking, playing sport, swimming, cycling or some other form of regular exercise can all help maintain your physical fitness.

Membership of the brigade

Criteria for membership
To be a member of a volunteer fire brigade, you will need to be:
• in good health and of sound body and mind;
• of good moral character and habits; and
• over the age of 17 years (except in the case of a junior member).

Probationary period
New members are enrolled as Probationary Volunteer Firefighters and, after serving three months satisfactory service, may be recommended by the brigade Captain for transfer to the active volunteer grade. Once this occurs, the member will be transferred to active member status when a vacancy appears.
**Criminal history checks**
All new FESA volunteers and those transferring between Brigades are required to undertake a Police Check prior to commencing with FESA. Please refer to the *FESA Police Check* brochure.

**Resignations**
Members who wish to resign or retire from the membership shall tender their resignation in writing to the brigade.

**Struck off roll**
Members may be struck off the roll if they fail to meet the required standards and position criteria detailed in the roles and responsibilities below.

**Categories of members**
A volunteer fire brigade has the following categories of membership:
- Active Members;
- Probationary Members
- Reserve Members;
- Junior Members; and
- Support Members.

**Probationary Member**
Probationary volunteer firefighters are required to attend fires and other incidents when required and, through their three month probationary period, can attend brigade meetings.

**Active Members**
Active membership entitles the volunteer to attend all incidents when required and to assist other members to maintain brigade apparatus, plant and buildings. Active members must also make themselves effective by attending monthly practices and drills held by the brigade.

**Reserve Members**
Reserve Members shall make themselves available for all required fire calls and emergency incidents and shall keep themselves proficient by attending periodic drills and lectures, to the satisfaction of the brigade Captain.

**Junior/Cadet Members**
Some brigades support Junior Members. A junior member shall be over the age of 11 years but not over the age of 17 years and must have the written consent of a parent or guardian. Junior Members may be involved by operating pumps or using equipment. Junior Members do not attend fires or participate in brigade practices and drills held for other active brigade members.

**Support Members**
Support Members shall be available to attend incidents and provide support services such as assistance with equipment, radio monitoring and catering to other members of the brigade.
VFRS Operational Command Structure

Duties of Officers within Volunteer Brigades

Captain
The Captain is responsible for the overall leadership and management of the brigade. This includes operational leadership and incident management.

Lieutenant
The Lieutenant acts under, and with the Captain, and performs the Captain’s role when that person is not available. This role includes incident management.

Apparatus Officer
The Apparatus Officer takes charge of all apparatus and plant and is responsible for its cleanliness and the good order of the fire station. The Apparatus Officer assists the Lieutenant in that role and performs the duties of Lieutenant when that person is not available.

Secretary
The Secretary is in charge of the administration of the brigade. The Secretary’s duties include:
- maintaining the brigade’s membership records;
- maintaining records of the brigade’s meetings;
- handling all correspondence; and
- maintaining the brigade’s financial records.

Duties of all brigade members
Being a member of a volunteer fire brigade is about belonging to a team. It is important that within that environment you maintain a high standard of personal behaviour that will enhance the reputation of both your local brigade and FESA. FESA has a ‘Code of Conduct’ and you will be required to adhere to this. Please refer to the FESA Code of Conduct brochure which is provided on joining.

Your behaviour, even when performing in a private capacity, can be associated with your brigade and FESA. Activities that may bring your brigade or FESA into disrepute should be avoided. You must ensure that you are properly dressed in authorised protective clothing when involved in brigade operational and training activities. When representing the brigade in the community, you should be suitably attired.

Part of recognising your responsibility to yourself, your fellow firefighters and the community, means you must be free from any influence of alcohol or other substances/medications whenever you are involved in any brigade activities, including operational duties.
You should not carry out any tasks for which you have not been adequately trained. To do so would compromise your safety and that of other brigade members. However, when involved with any work as a volunteer firefighter, it is important that you make an effort to carry out the work in a responsible and ethical manner.

Finally, you should view yourself as a valued team member in the brigade with a right to contribute to any decisions (after the probationary period and while you are a member) that will affect your work.

**Other responsibilities**

Members must notify the Brigade of any changes to their name, address or phone number. Members must also advise the Captain of any illness or injury which could affect their ability to carry out their duties as a member of the brigade. Any members who experience a problem as a result of their volunteer service should consult their brigade Captain as soon as possible.

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**Welfare for Volunteers**

FESA is an emergency service which responds to a range of incidents that may be stressful to an individual. The incidents range from industrial accident, road crash rescue, to structural and bush fires at which people sometimes sustain significant or life-threatening injuries. Please consider this when thinking about joining.

**FESA Support Services**

FESA has a range of support services that can be accessed via free call 1800 15 33 44 from anywhere in Western Australia. These include:

**Chaplaincy**

FESA has a full-time chaplain for pastoral care and related matters. The chaplain provides a vital first line support service during emergencies for both FESA people and the public. Additional services include critical incident stress management, social and welfare issues, grief support and individual or group counselling. The chaplain may also undertake religious ceremonies for FESA people and is often part of official functions.

**Employee Assistance Program (EAP)**

Professional counselling services are available for FESA staff and volunteers through its Employee Assistance Program (EAP). This program is useful for people with specific needs and work-related or personal problems. FESA staff and volunteers are free to contact the nominated EAP provider, who may offer access to professional counselling.
Peer Support
Peer Supporters provide assistance to people affected by critical incident stress and other personal issues. The program has a network of over 120 trained members throughout Western Australia representing all of FESA's operational divisions. 'Peer Supporters' are an excellent source of support for fellow volunteers and staff and are trained to identify when extra assistance and referral is required.

Family Support Unit
The Family Support Unit is closely associated with the Peer Support program and provides extended support for FESA staff and volunteers in times of hardship or dislocation. This service can be varied and tailored to suit the needs of individuals and/or their family. The Unit can provide important assistance, such as transportation, meals, home help or child minding. It can also arrange for accommodation or someone to listen to problems or concerns.

Legal Proceedings Support
This service provides valuable assistance to FESA members involved in legal proceedings. On request, a skilled FESA staff member is able to provide general information on relevant legal matters. This includes meeting with individuals and groups and, in some cases, accompanying them to court hearings. This service does not include legal advice.

Workers Compensation/Insurance
Insurance cover for FESA staff and volunteers is superior to the normal workers compensation. Specific information is available for individuals in relation to their claims and general advice on insurance cover and associated benefits. Where illness or injuries are involved, the Health Safety and Welfare branch works closely with individuals on rehabilitation and return-to-work plans.

General information

On-going training
Probationary and active members of each brigade shall train in fire suppression methods or other drills and exercises at least once per calendar month.

Election of Office Bearers
All volunteer office bearers are nominated and elected by the eligible volunteer members of the brigade. The election is conducted in the first week of June on an annual basis.

Competitions
Competitions are held throughout the State every year, culminating with the Annual Championships held at North Fremantle every Easter. These competitions are conducted and coordinated by the Western Australian Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service Association in conjunction with FESA.

Brigade Awards
There are a number of awards available to members both at a local level and a National level. For more information contact your Brigade Captain or District/Area Manager. Alternatively, visit to FESA's website at www.fesa.wa.gov.au and click on FESA > News and Media > Awards.
Volunteer Firefighter Training

FESA recommends that all volunteers complete the relevant training pathway prior to attending any emergency incidents, and consider completing further training as part of their ongoing development as detailed in the brigade’s operational role profile. The emphasis of this training is to enhance volunteer safety and effectiveness.

As you become more experienced at firefighting, there is a range of training that is available to you. Volunteer Firefighter training has been developed to meet specific operational role requirements (to do a certain job or task) with the option to go on and complete a variety of other elective training programs. Training courses will be allocated in line with your brigade/unit’s operational profile.

Where to get information on training

For course information and details on training programs, procedures and guidelines you should initially contact your Brigade Captain or Training Officer. The relevant Regional Office will also be able to assist.

Alternatively, personnel at the FESA Training Centre can provide information and advice on training and assessment services.

FESA Training Centre
547 Dundas Road, Forrestfield WA 6058
Tel: (08) 9454 0777
1800 648 150
Fax: (08) 9454 0714
Email: training@fesa.wa.gov.au

Volunteer Recruitment Information Line

The Volunteer and Youth Services Branch (VYSB) have established a Volunteer Recruitment Information Line. The free call 1800 628 141 will go directly through to a VYSB officer from Monday to Friday 0800 hrs – 1700 hrs and be diverted to message bank after these hours and on Saturdays, Sundays and Public Holidays.

Through the implementation of this service, the VYSB aims to provide prospective volunteers with timely and accurate information pertaining to their area/s of interest. The caller is provided with information on the Brigade in their local area, the roles and responsibilities associated with operational and non-operational positions, contact details and brochures.

For more information contact the FESA Manager Volunteer & Youth Services on 9323 9567.

Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to read this material and for considering the Fire & Rescue Service of WA. Your decision to become involved with such a community-based organisation as the VFRS will make you a respected and valued member of your community.

If you have some further inquiries about your prospective role as a volunteer firefighter, contact the brigade Captain or one of the other officers.