

Podcast 116 – Volunteer Firefighters in Australia

Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia,
with Rob McCormack

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<http://traffic.libsyn.com/slowenglish/podcast116.mp3>

Hi,

Australia has always been a land of summer bushfires. Our vast areas of bushland and our hot and dry summers have always created the perfect conditions for wild bushfires, often started by lightning during summer thunder storms. In this podcast, I would like to tell you about the volunteer firefighters in regional and country areas of Australia, who bravely fight these fires each and every summer, to protect people's lives and property.

Australia has had a long tradition of volunteer firefighters in regional areas of Australia. In the big cities, our firefighters are paid professionals, as is the case in other countries around the world. However in country and regional areas of Australia, it is neither practical nor affordable for professional firefighting teams to be maintained. Instead, as is also the case in many other countries around the world, the firefighting is done by teams of volunteers. These are people who live and work in the community, doing normal jobs such as butchers, carpenters, accountants, teachers, farmers, managers, shopkeepers, dentists, hairdressers, plus any other job you can think of. In fact volunteer firefighters come from every occupation. These are people who care about their community strongly and are willing to help fight dangerous fires which might threaten their communities.

In my state of Victoria, the volunteer fire fighter organization is called the Country Fire Authority (or CFA). In New South Wales, it is called the Rural Fire Service (or RFS), which is the biggest volunteer fire fighting service in Australia. The other states also have similar organizations and they all do a wonderful job protecting our communities each and every fire season in summer. I'll just talk about the Victorian CFA in my home state of Victoria in this podcast. For full and accurate information about our volunteer firefighting organizations, you should visit the relevant website, such as <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/home>. I will provide a high level summary here.



A CFA fire station on the outskirts of Melbourne.

The CFA in Victoria (as at 2019) is organized into 1217 brigades (or teams), each of which is located in a country town or country location right across Victoria. These 1217

brigades together have around 53,000 volunteers. Of these, around 34,000 are volunteers who are operational firefighters. This means that, when required, they are actively involved in fighting fires. This means responding at any time of the day or night to go to the scene of the fire. Firefighting is a dangerous activity so all volunteers must be fully trained before they can become part of the firefighting team. Training takes up to 6 months and covers general firefighting, safety, first aid, wildfire behaviours, radio communications, map reading and many other skills. Only when a volunteer has completed all this training satisfactorily can they become part of a firefighting team and then attend a fire emergency. It is also important to note that volunteer CFA firefighters also attend and assist at other types of emergencies, such as floods, road accidents, chemical accidents and other types of rescues. The CFA owns and uses over 2000 well equipped fire trucks, over 200 pumpers (which are trucks with a large pump which can pump large amounts of water onto a fire from a reservoir or other store of water), plus a range of other special firefighting vehicles. You can see how important it is that CFA volunteers are fully trained and able to handle all types of emergency situations and equipment. As well as attending at emergencies, operational firefighters must attend a minimum number of brigade meetings and further training sessions, in order to keep up with the latest information and to maintain their skills.

Not all CFA volunteers are firefighters. The remaining volunteers in the CFA are called non-operational volunteers. They don't actually fight fires, but they perform all the other supporting tasks for the firefighters, such as raising money, educating local communities, liaising with the media, administration, maintaining firefighting equipment and many other activities. Non-operational roles mean that a large range of people from the community can play a role in keeping their community safe through the CFA.

The CFA also has a junior program, for young people aged 11 to 15 years. Under the guidance of a senior CFA leader, they learn practical firefighting skills such as map reading, radio communications, first aid and general education about fire safety and awareness. It is a great leadership development program. Once they turn 16 years of age, with parental consent they can begin the transition to become a senior firefighter if they so wish.

I am extremely lucky never to have been directly affected by a bushfire. However, in the summer of 2019/20, unprecedented fires have blazed across eastern Australia, especially Victoria and New South Wales. As I write this podcast in January 2020, the fires are still raging and our brave volunteer firefighters continue the fight. Tragically, three volunteer fire fighters in New South Wales have been killed in the last month as they fought these catastrophic fires. Australia owes so much to its volunteer firefighters.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHdVd5GY1kE&feature=emb_logo

If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it in the comments box at the bottom of this page. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. I will write back to you, in English of course. If you would like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

Podcast 116 Quiz - Did you

understand the podcast?

You can take the quiz as many times as you like.

Start quiz

Vocabulary

accurate = correct

actively involved = when you are part of an activity

administration = organizing things and keeping records, managing things

affordable = when something doesn't cost too much

assist = to help

attend = to go to

awareness = when you know of something

bravely = when someone continues to do something dangerous even though they are afraid

brigades = a way to describe a team of firefighters

bushfires = fires that burn through forest or bush

catastrophic = when an event happens which is very harmful, bringing terrible damage, injury and loss of life

community = the people who live in your own town or city

conditions = how things are, what state they are in

country areas = away from the big cities

dangerous = when you could get hurt or die from something

educating = teaching

emergency = an accident or event when things have gone wrong

guidance = being shown the way

handle = to use

junior = of a young age

leadership development = giving people the skills to be leaders

liaising = contacting, talking to

lightning = a strong burst of electricity during a storm

located = placed, found at

maintained = when things are kept in good working condition or at the same level

media = newspapers, television

occupation = job, profession

organizations = groups of people who work together to create or do something

parental consent = when the parents of a young person under 18 give their agreement that they can do an activity

perfect = without error, fault or defect

perform = to do

practical = is possible, can be done

professionals = people who are paid to do a job

property = houses, buildings, things built on land

protect = to keep something safe

provide = to give

raging = (here) very bad, very severe, very dangerous

regional = away from the big cities

relevant = (here) has a connection to, is important for

rescues = to save somebody from a dangerous situation

reservoir = a large area of water like a dam or lake

responding = answering to, reacting to

satisfactorily = to meet a required standard, to be good enough

scene = the place where something is happening.

season = a time of the year

service = something which helps you

similar = is like something else

situations = how things are

store = to keep

supporting tasks = things which help others to do their work

threaten = when someone or something appears to be a danger

thunder = the sound made by lightning, a booming sound during a storm

tradition = something which has been done for a long time

tragically = when something really bad happens, usually involving injuries and death

transition = to move from one situation to another situation

unprecedented = never before seen

vast = very large

vehicles = cars, trucks, motorcycles

volunteer = someone who works without being paid

well equipped = when you have good equipment

wild = (here) out in the bush or forest

wildfire behaviours = how a fire in the bush or forest behaves.