

Project Firefighters

Firefighting
employment
in Victoria



The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and Parks Victoria are looking for people who want to help protect Victorian communities from bushfire to become seasonal firefighters as part of Forest Fire Management 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 make a contribution, be challenged, work as part of a team and develop career pathways.

What is Forest Fire Management?

Forest Fire Management crews are made up of firefighters from DELWP and Parks Victoria. These crews work in partnership with other emergency agencies to prevent and suppress bushfires in Victoria's national parks and state forests. Forest Fire Management 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 from the threat of bushfire.



What is Project Firefighter (PFF) employment?

DELWP and Parks Victoria 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 four categories of PFFs each year:

- Firefighters (includes designated Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people positions)
- Fire Support Officers (limited positions)
- Hover exit crews (limited positions)
- Rappel crews (limited positions).

What do I need to do to become a PFF?

These positions would suit men and women who are sound decision makers, community minded and looking for a unique challenge.

All preferred applicants are required to undergo a National Police Record Check, Interview, Medical Assessment and Task Based Assessment. 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 other locations and are provided accommodation on those 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 ie, slashing, clearing tracks and culverts, planned burning operations,
- maintenance of facilities and equipment, and
- road construction and general field work in forests and parks.

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
- Require permission or a work permit to work in Australia for the full employment period
- Have the ability to work safely and effectively in a team
- Have the 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.

Specialist Firefighter Roles

Rappel and hover exit

Much of Victoria's public land is remote, mountainous and inaccessible. Fires in these areas are usually caused by lightning and if not accessed and suppressed immediately, can grow in size quickly. Transporting crews by air allows us to get to these fires quickly so we can extinguish all burning material.

DELWP currently has four seven-person rappel crews employed during the fire season (November to April). These crews are based at Heyfield and Ovens. DELWP also has two five-person hover exit crews employed each season, based at Horsham.



What is rappeling?

Using specialised equipment (similar to that used by abseilers), specialist DELWP firefighters 'abseil' or rappel down ropes from a hovering helicopter to the ground. The maximum height for a helicopter rappel is 100 metres. Once crews have rappelled to the ground, specialised firefighting equipment is lowered from the helicopter to the ground. The helicopter may assist crews by fire-bombing with water or foam. Once suppression of the fire is complete, the rappel crew must walk to a pick up site with their equipment.

What is hover exiting?

Hover exiting is primarily designed for areas where ground vegetation or terrain prevent a helicopter from conducting a full landing. Hover exiting is the smooth transfer of trained personnel and equipment from a hovering helicopter to the ground. Hover exits are conducted from a maximum height of 1.3 metres. Hover exit crews must walk to a pickup site once the fire suppression operation is complete.

What are the prerequisites specific to hover exit and rappel firefighters?

All rappel and hover exit crews are expected to meet standard PFF prerequisites as a minimum. In addition, they must:

- Maintain a body weight of equal to or less than 95 kilograms in boots and overalls
- Be comfortable working at heights and from helicopters
- Be comfortable working and camping in extremely remote places
- Be able to implicitly follow verbal and written instructions and hand signals
- Have at least one year's experience as a General Firefighter with either DELWP or Parks Victoria and have gained accreditation as a DELWP General Firefighter; or equivalent Wild Land Firefighter experience.

Is special training required?

Both rappel and hover exit crews are required to undergo rigorous specialised training. Rappel training is conducted over three weeks by accredited DELWP staff, prior to the commencement of each season. Trainees stay away from home for the duration of the training (accommodation is provided). Ongoing training is required throughout the season to meet currency requirements.

Other things to know

Rappel and hover exit operations normally occur in remote forest locations. Crews may be required to remain overnight or for extended hours on the fire line. Normal conveniences such as phone coverage, shops, etc. may not be accessible from these areas.

Rappel and hover exit crew members are a state firefighting resource and may be required to move around Victoria at short notice. This can include in light aircraft across long distances.



What about health and fitness?

Forest Fire Management 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/hover exit fitness test is slightly different to that used for standard PFF positions. This reflects the different, and often more rigorous work, undertaken by rappel and hover exit crews.

How are medical and fitness levels determined?

Medical Assessment

Part of the firefighter selection process is a specific firefighter medical assessment which is required for employment. The pre-employment medical assessment will be conducted by a medical practitioner nominated by DELWP. The assessment is paid for by DELWP and tests 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.

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 roles of rappel/hover exit 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 hover exit and rappel, must successfully complete the pack hike test to be considered for employment. Following the successful completion of the pack hike test, hover exit and 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 and hover exit 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 hover exit and rappel operations. Hover exit and 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:
<http://jobs.careers.vic.gov.au/pff>

For more information you can:

- Contact your local DELWP or Parks Victoria office
- Contact the DELWP Customer Service Centre on 136 186
- For more information on forest firefighting, visit www.delwp.vic.gov.au

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