

RESPONSE

RESILIENT AND READY FOR THE PEOPLE OF QUEENSLAND

QUEENSLAND'S OFFICIAL FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES MAGAZINE DECEMBER 2021



**Season's greetings to all –
—wherever you are**

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RESPONSE is a bi-monthly magazine produced by Queensland Fire and Emergency Services. Contributions and feedback are welcome. The Editor reserves the right to edit submissions for brevity and clarity.

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Address: Response magazine, Media, Communications and Online Branch, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, GPO Box 1425, Brisbane, QLD, 4001

Editor: Jarryd Luke

Phone: 07 3635 3314

Email: Magazine.Editor@qfes.qld.gov.au

Advertising: Martyn Hewett

Email: mkhewett@bigpond.com

Graphic Design: Dexart Graphic Design

Email: dexartgraphicdesign@gmail.com

QFES acknowledges and recognises Traditional Owners as custodians of the lands where we work together with the communities of Queensland. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestors of these lands, their spirits and their legacy.

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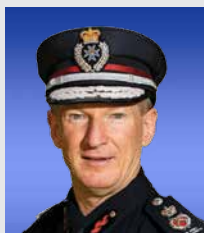
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FOREWORDS



GREG LEACH
Commissioner

QUEENSLAND FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

This year has brought momentous changes for QFES that will help us continue to adapt and develop the way we work with the community.

QFES members from all services continued to support COVID-19 operations throughout the year and I would like to thank everyone involved for helping minimise the pandemic's impact on Queensland.

We have welcomed many new recruits into our ranks, with our final recruit course of the year graduating at the end of November. This year we celebrated the largest recruit parade in QFES history, with 69 future firefighters from six recruit courses.

We took the time to celebrate our State Emergency Service (SES) and Rural Fire Service (RFS) volunteers during SES Week and RFS Week. These occasions are important because a well-deserved thank you can make all the difference to our wonderful volunteers, who put so much time and effort into their work.

We've seen our preparation and the community's pay off during Operation Paratus and Operation Kurrabana. I would like to acknowledge everyone who has been working hard in both these operations, particularly with more potential storms and cyclones on the horizon.

I learnt many important lessons from touring around Queensland this year and having conversations with staff and volunteers in each region. Since then, we've been working to turn your ideas into action.

Some of the areas we've been developing are the volunteer onboarding process and the gender equity advisory group, which has held its first meeting.

We recently received the results of the Working for Queensland and Volunteering for Queensland surveys, where you gave us your honest feedback about what's working well and where we can improve.

We're taking a ground-up approach where your team leaders will discuss the survey feedback and potential solutions with you and share your suggestions with management.

I can't wait to continue travelling around the state and meeting with you in 2022 to discuss the future of our organisation.

I hope you have a wonderful holiday season and I would like to thank in advance those of you who will be serving your communities over the holidays.



MIKE WASSING AFSM
Deputy Commissioner

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT, VOLUNTEERISM AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Climate change is bringing more severe disasters to our doorstep and it's our job to make sure QFES, our services and our communities are ready.

We're reviewing our Climate Change Action Plan to ensure we keep adapting to these more intense and frequent emergencies, as well as reducing our own carbon footprint.

QFES has led some excellent work in this area, including contributing to Queensland's input at the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow.

Minister for the Environment Susan Ley launched the new National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy and Australia's first Adaptation Communication at the conference. The latter references QFES' State Heatwave Report Risk Assessment.

It's fantastic to see our important work on climate change highlighted on the world stage.

The Bureau of Meteorology released their summer seasonal outlook at the end of November, and declared the La Niña is likely to bring above-average rainfall in eastern Queensland. For many communities in Queensland and NSW, it's already been the wettest November on record and we are already responding to numerous flood events.

Daytime temperatures are likely to be warmer than normal for much of Queensland. Bushfire risk may not be as high as in previous years, but bushfires happen every summer and even short periods of hot and windy weather will raise the fire risk.

We can expect an average to slightly above average number of tropical cyclones and tropical lows.

I would like to thank the volunteers and staff from all services for their efforts to date, working with the community to keep people safe.

During this busy operational time, it's important to stay safe and look out for ourselves and each other. We're only human, no matter how many calls are coming in. Managing fatigue is a major part of ensuring we can continue to support the community to the best of our ability.

I wish you and your families all the best over the festive season. May you have a safe and happy holiday season with loved ones and a well-deserved rest.



A productive year for QFES

Looking back on 2021, QFES staff and volunteers have much to be proud of, from operational responses to fundraising for worthy causes. A year of innovations, community engagement and team building has placed us in an ideal position to take on the challenges of 2022.

Storms

State Emergency Service (SES) members were out in force supporting the community at the start of the year, responding to tropical lows and flooding as well as Cyclone Imogen in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

In March, floodwaters rose across south-east Queensland and QFES members from all three services worked with our community and partners to keep people safe, answering more than 1400 calls for assistance.

Once the situation in Queensland was under control, about 170 QFES members travelled south to aid the flood response in NSW.

Fires

This year we introduced major changes to Operation Cool Burn (OCB) to improve the way we assess bushfire risk and time our mitigation activities.

By June, the planning phase for OCB was mostly complete, with many Bushfire Mitigation Plans finalised across Queensland.

Area Fire Management Groups identified 295 high-risk areas and QFES and our partners planned to conduct up to 560 activities to help manage these risks.

QFES also improved the way we create and send bushfire warnings, developing a new system that automates a lot of the process and allows QFES members in each region to send warnings regionally.

While the bushfire season wasn't as intense as in previous years, many fires still burnt across Queensland and the Rural Fire Service (RFS) were hard at work keeping them at bay.

People

In February we welcomed our PSBA colleagues who moved across to QFES as part of a transition that will help deliver better outcomes for QFES, our partners and communities.

QFES continues to work towards establishing a new single marine rescue service in Queensland to ensure the sustainability of marine rescue into the future, giving volunteers greater protection and reducing their reliance on fundraising.

In 2021 QFES also employed our first ever apprentices, who are developing their mechanical skills in regional workshops.

Conversations

Commissioner Greg Leach toured around Queensland during the year to hear what matters most to our staff and volunteers.

Mr Leach met with more than 620 QFES members from south-west to far northern Queensland to identify what was working well and areas where we could improve.

QFES has already replied to some of the enquiries and work is underway on the areas for improvement.

Capability

Thanks to more than \$3.5 million in donations from the community in the wake of the Black Summer Bushfires, the RFS bought a range of new equipment early in the year, including 800 bushfire mapping tablets.

QFES also rolled out FleetWave, our new digital system to track the repair and service history of all vehicles, which has received overwhelmingly positive feedback.

In another step forward, all QFES volunteers and staff can now access live mapping of incidents in the Mobile Situational Overview app, making it easier for everyone to stay up to date.

To reduce firefighters' risk of exposure to toxic substances while fighting fires and handling contaminated equipment, QFES developed a new decontamination process.



QFES also built models of how climate change will affect Australia in the years ahead so we can better prepare for increasing natural disasters and changing service demands.

Community

QFES sent five fire trucks across the sea to the Papua New Guinea Fire Service in February to help out our Pacific neighbours.

In June QFES joined forces with the AEIOU Foundation for Children with Autism to make our Fire Ed program more inclusive. A new version of the program features modified language and fire drill activities for children with autism.

The theme of NAIDOC Week in July was Heal Country, a call for all of us to continue to seek greater protections for our lands, waters, sacred sites and cultural heritage. QFES took several opportunities to learn from traditional owners about Indigenous cultural fire management practices this year.

During Multicultural Queensland Month (August), we held events to engage with our diverse communities.

To mark the 20th anniversary of September 11, QFES collaborated with the Queensland Police Service to host a special Commemorative Sports Day with about 2000 people in attendance.

On R U OK? Day in October, QFES took the opportunity to explore mental health with a talk from Professor Jane Shakespeare-Finch, an expert from the Queensland University of Technology specialising in post-traumatic growth.

This year QFES also expanded the Road Attitudes and Action Planning (RAAP) and Fight Fire Fascination (FFF) programs, working with our partners to reach more vulnerable and at-risk children.

Fundraising

Early in the year, QFES members across all regions donated 410 lunch boxes and stationery items to the QFES Zephyr Education lunch box drive.



About 500 hundred people went along to the annual Emergency Services Cup in April, which for the first time featured a women's Aussie Rules match between QFES and the Queensland Police Service.

One hundred QFES members from across Queensland walked 110 kilometres in the Darkness to Daylight challenge in May to raise awareness and funds to help end domestic and family violence.

QFES members from all three services rappelled down Castle Hill in Townsville in June to raise valuable funds for the Brighter Lives Townsville Hospital Foundation. Tickets sold out in under 24 hours and the team raised \$8,500.

Another fundraising initiative in June was the Bike 4 Burns ride, in which 33 QFES members rode 710 kilometres from Gympie to Brisbane to raise funds for children's burn research.

Firefighters are more likely to develop 12 types of cancer, so the Real Fires Wear Pink campaign raised funds in October to support them.

QFES members also got behind Movember, putting on activities and events to raise funds for men's physical and mental health. At time of writing, the total raised was more than \$25,000.



Celebrations

On Wear Orange Wednesday, as part of National Volunteer Week in May, we celebrated the dedication and teamwork of our SES volunteers.

The Torres Shire Emergency Services Cadets Unit on Thursday Island won the Partnership category of QFES' Closing the Gap Awards in June for building opportunities for local young people.

During RFS Week in August, we celebrated the dedication of our 31,000 volunteers who work so hard to keep Queenslanders safe.

Also in August, more than 250 future emergency responders took part in the seventh annual Cadet Games in Brisbane and Townsville, with RFS cadets celebrating their first ever victory.

Reflection

We now face the second year in a row of La Niña, but the SES have been preparing for what's ahead and Queensland is in safe hands.

As we head into the new year, it's worth reflecting on the great work we've done together and all the initiatives we've put in place to continuously improve the way we operate.



Queensland prepares for severe weather

With La Niña bringing heavy rainfall across Queensland, the State Emergency Service (SES) has been working hard with the community to make sure residents know their risk and get prepared.

Glenn Alderton, Acting Director State Coordination Branch, said the SES had received about 1750 requests for assistance from the start of September to the end of November.

“Some of the catchments have already been saturated, which means any rain we get from now on can’t soak into the ground and will run off as flooding,” Glenn said.

“We’ve already seen early flooding in several regions. Luckily most of the storms have been isolated over small communities and haven’t caused large-scale damage.

“La Niña has been forecast until the end of summer, so we’re expecting the rains to continue for a few months. There could also be an early start to cyclone season, potentially in December.”

Several areas experienced their wettest November on record and townships such as Birdsville, Bedourie, Burketown and Doomadgee were isolated by flooding.

QFES crews helped evacuate around 800 residents from the southern border town of Inglewood on 30 November after floodwaters peaked at 11.15 metres, inundating homes and businesses.

Glenn said the SES, as a severe weather agency, trained for these events all year round.

“Our volunteers have also been doing a lot of community education to help people prepare,” he said.

“Every resident in Queensland should know what their risks are. If they’re new in an area, they could chat with neighbours to see how common storms or floods are. They could contact their local government to get a copy of the local disaster management plan.

“If a drain near them tends to flood, they could go to their local nursery and pick up some sandbags. If their street tends to get cut off, they could get a week’s worth of groceries and stock up their emergency kit.

“It’s not just about cleaning your gutter – it’s about identifying the risks.”

Glenn encouraged all Queenslanders to download the ‘SES Assistance QLD’ app, which allows them to log jobs and send them straight to their local SES group.



QFES members rescued four people from a flooded creek in Barnard.

“It saves a lot of time because you don’t have to ring and wait in a queue. It also gives you the option to take photos so the SES already knows the context of your request before they get there.”

Back it Up

QFES’ ‘If it’s Flooded Forget it’ campaign has been reminding Queenslanders the smartest thing they can do when faced with floodwater is back it up. Several rescues and a tragic accident in recent weeks have underscored how dangerous these situations can be.

The SES and Fire and Rescue Service rescued four people after their four-wheel-drive was swept away in a flooded creek in Barnard.

Auxiliary firefighter Robbie Price from Baralaba was on the first responding appliance.

“The water was 1.3 metres high and flowing at four knots,” Robbie said. “Four people had been clinging to trees in the water for 45 minutes when we arrived.

“They said they couldn’t hang on anymore, but if they let go, they would have been caught in a barbed wire fence downstream.

“I went into the water until it was up to my chest, threw a rope to the two closest people and pulled them out.

“A small helicopter that was mustering cattle on a nearby property flew over. We asked the pilot to take the rope across to a car on the other side of the creek and tie it to their bull bar.

“Then I tied it to our truck and used it as a secure line to walk out to the remaining two people and give them a lifejacket and tube so we could pull them out.

“The police, paramedics and firefighters all worked really well together. I’d like to thank everyone involved in the rescue, including the members of the Moura Rural Fire Brigade, led by Peter Smith.”



Commissioner Greg Leach announced QFES’ response to the severe weather season would be known as Operation Kurrabana, an Indigenous term from the Yirrganydji language, referring to the wet season that spans from November to May in their seasonal calendar.

The future is electric

QFES is introducing electric vehicles (EVs) and installing charging bays to pave the way for a more environmentally conscious fleet.

QFES has ordered two Hyundai Kona EVs – an award-winning, zero-emission SUV with a driving range of up to 485 kilometres.

The project of introducing EVs and installing charging bays to meet Queensland Government targets for reducing emissions was led by Acting Executive Manager, Fleet Strategy Marie Page.

Marie said the QFES Leased Fleet EVs can be recharged at five new charging bays installed at the Emergency Services Complex in Kedron.

“The bays can fully recharge the cars overnight,” she said. “Imagine your petrol car being full every morning just by leaving it in the garage.”

Deputy Commissioner Mike Wassing, Chair of QFES’ Climate Change Working Group, said, “As an organisation with a very large fleet of vehicles throughout the state, it’s essential we begin to move toward alternate fuels to reduce our emissions footprint.

“QFES continues to lead many climate adaptation strategies in the emergency services sector. Moving to electric vehicles is another step in doing our part.”

QFES staff will be provided with easy-to-follow instructions about how to use the chargers, operate the vehicles and find charging stations across Queensland.

The Queensland Electric Super Highway is one of the world’s longest electric super highways in a single state. There are already 31 fast-charging sites from Coolangatta to Port Douglas and Brisbane to Toowoomba.

Eighteen more charging stations will be added in the future to reach more regional and rural locations, along with more connections along the Queensland/NSW border.

QFleet Fleet Customer Experience Manager Peter Matthews said, “QFleet recently drove an EV from Brisbane to Cairns and back again using the super highway.

“The team covered 4000 kilometres and it cost just \$107. The trip was zero emissions

because the super highway is powered by renewable energy. A petrol vehicle would have emitted 635 kilograms of carbon dioxide.”

BJ Siem, Senior Account Manager, QFleet said all car makers were looking to change over from internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles to EVs over the next two decades.

“This coincides with overseas governments looking to ban the sale of ICE vehicles altogether to reduce transport’s effect on climate change,” he said.

“Norway is looking to ban ICE sales from 2025 and the UK and EU are planning to do the same by 2030.

“Transport is Australia’s second largest emitter after the energy industry and is responsible for more than 100 million tonnes of carbon dioxide annually.”

The Queensland Government has committed to reducing its emissions by 30 per cent (compared with 2005 levels) by 2030 and reaching net zero emissions by 2050.

“The EV strategy also supports the Queensland Government’s Electric Vehicle Strategy, which is about to be updated to include an action plan for increasing the number of EVs on Queensland roads,” BJ said.



A/Executive Manager of Facilities Management Lisa Marini, A/Executive Manager of Fleet Strategy Marie Page and QFleet Fleet Customer Experience Manager Peter Matthews.

“QFleet has doubled the number of EVs in the government’s fleet each year since 2019. The number of EVs will top 144 at the end of 2021 and 288 at the end of 2022.”

Marie continues to work closely with QFleet to meet QFES’ EV targets, with plans for more EVs over the coming years.

BJ said he also expected commercial vehicles to be electrified over time.

“Battery- and hydrogen-powered heavy and light trucks are being trialled overseas and Norway even has a battery-powered vehicle ferry,” he said.

“Heavy commercial trucks and buses may be powered by hydrogen fuel cells, which produce electricity by mixing hydrogen and air. The only by-product is water.

“Hydrogen fuel cells are lighter and more energy dense than batteries and can be refilled in minutes, but they can’t be recharged from a power point – they need hydrogen filling stations.

“The industry expects both technologies – battery electric vehicles and fuel cell vehicles – to have a place in the future of transport, similar to how we have petrol and diesel now. So in the future we may see hydrogen-powered fire trucks supported by battery-electric emergency response vehicles.”



Acting Deputy Commissioner Adam Stevenson with one of QFES’ new Hyundai Kona electric vehicles.



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New train prop at Whyte Island

The Queensland Combined Emergency Services Academy has installed a new train prop to help prepare for train crashes and other incidents.

The academy welcomed its new addition with a joint training exercise where firefighters worked with Queensland Police Service, Queensland Ambulance Service, Queensland Rail and Australian Defence Force personnel to rescue people from a simulated collision between the train and a bus.

Paul Omanski, State Road Crash Training Coordinator, said the project helped improve interoperability between the emergency services and Queensland Rail.

"After a train crash in Rockhampton and similar incidents in NSW and Victoria, coroner recommendations were for a training facility involving a full-size train," Paul said.

"We do have access to rollingstock but at times it can be difficult to co-ordinate. Central Region has a coal wagon and the State Counter-Terrorism Unit at Wacol has the shell of a new generation rollingstock. This is the first installation of a full-size train on track in Queensland."

Weighing in at 120 tonnes, the train has three carriages and is in surprisingly good condition after 40 years of service.

"The train prop has greatly improved our ability to instruct people in identifying hazards, lifting trains, moving them and evacuating people," Paul said.

"We used to travel to the Ipswich Rail Workshop and Museum to do training for rail crashes, but we could only take select crews with limited equipment.

"With the upgrade of the Queensland Rail suburban network fleet to new generation rollingstock, we jumped on the chance to obtain one of their decommissioned Electric Multiple Unit trains. They kindly agreed to store it next to the Port of Brisbane Coal Terminal for us."

The next challenge was getting track laid.

"It was easy getting the train. The nightmare was getting the track laid for the train to sit on. Major earthworks were undertaken to stabilise the ground under the tracks," Paul said. "Queensland Rail dug out the entire bank and put in around 30 truckloads of road base.

"The entire project was funded by

Queensland Rail at a cost of around half a million dollars. The original plan included a platform, boom gates and overhead powerlines, but flooding near Cloncurry caused rail track to be washed out and Queensland Rail re-directed funding that way. We did however design the prop so we can add those extensions in the future."

Paul said the train was for all services. With more than 6000 kilometres of track in Queensland, it's useful for the State Emergency Service and Rural Fire Service to familiarise themselves with it, as they might have to work in and around a rail corridor.

"They have to obtain permission by Queensland Rail via FireCom before anyone enters the rail corridor. It can be difficult for trains to slow down. Train drivers need to know well ahead of time if someone's in the rail corridor.

"On the south-east Queensland suburban rail network, QFES used to attend rail incidents around once every fortnight, from cars stuck on track to pedestrians struck at level crossings."

The introduction of Queensland Rail Operational Response Units and added surveillance at the level crossings has seen a notable reduction in QFES attendance in recent years.

Paul said the pure weight of trains made these incidents challenging.

"Access to the track can also be an issue. For example, the rail corridor to the Gold Coast is quite steep, and the Airtrain Brisbane Airport line is high up on stilts.

"When a train's not at a station, it's hard to evacuate people and find somewhere to triage them. That means they may be stuck in the train longer and with no power, which means no aircon."

Paul is part of an advisory group across Australasia that discusses the latest techniques for these kinds of incidents.

"We try different ideas and if we find an easier or quicker way of doing something, we adopt it into our procedures."



Firefighters worked with paramedics to evacuate actors from the simulated collision.



The training simulated a collision between a train and a bus.

QFES shines in fires and floods

A two-month battle with bushfires and 23 frantic hours of pulling people from floodwaters – QFES volunteers were recognised for their courageous work in the QBank Everyday Heroes Awards.

At a ceremony in Townsville, State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers Reece Booij and Richard Patrick won the Working Together Award for going above and beyond to rescue more than 100 people from floodwaters in 2019.

Mount Alford Rural Fire Brigade First Officer Trevor Turner won the Achievement Award for his unflinching resolve in helping save his town during the black summer bushfires.

The winners received \$1000 and another \$1000 to donate to a charity of their choice.

Out of the floodwaters

During one chaotic night in 2019, Reece Booij and Richard Patrick saved 119 people and their pets from floodwaters despite being on the brink of exhaustion and hypothermia themselves.

Richard lives 50 kilometres outside Townsville and his own house was flooded early on.

“I went into town to help the Townsville SES Group and a call came through for a floodboat rescue. There were only half-a-dozen operators in town so I put my hand up.

“At first the water was knee-high and we used my car to tow the boat in. The only way I could launch the boat was to drive the car up on a roundabout to get some extra tilt. Reece and I did six hours in the water.

“Another floodboat call came through the next morning. The water was rising rapidly because the Ross River Dam had opened both doors. On one street we had to push our way through 45 floating cars.”

While Reece drove the boat, Richard pulled people out of the water.

“We evacuated people in wheelchairs by parking the boat on their lawns and helping them into it,” Richard said.

“Once the water was over 1.5 metres and people’s heads were just above water in their own houses, they started trying to jump in the boat. We were driving up to two-storey buildings and taking people off the balcony.”

They were told to aim to get out of the water by 8pm because the dam could potentially break its banks.

“We passed one man about 10 times while we were rescuing people and he kept saying he’d be right. He was sitting on a table in his house as the water went higher.

“Eventually the water was up to the roof and he was perched on a six-foot fence. He’d turned white. We told him to stay where he was, but he jumped in the water and was sucked into an eddy of water in a roundabout.

“Reece did a 360-degree turn, and luckily the man’s head came up out of the water and I grabbed him by the hair and pulled him into the boat. We put him in the corner with a lifejacket and a space blanket and he sat there rocking.

“We found a lady in a flooded house with a nine-month-old baby. I made my way through the water and walked up her stairs and she literally threw the baby at me.

“I put the baby above my head and waded back to the boat. We wrapped the baby in with the bloke in the space blanket. He got



Richard Patrick (middle) and Reece Booij (right) at the awards ceremony.



Trevor Turner from Mount Alford won the Achievement Award.

a bit of colour in him after that and he kept the baby safe.

"We had phones and radios with us, but by 7pm none of them were working so we didn't have any comms.

"We couldn't leave all those people. Reece and I came to an agreement that we'd keep going until there was no one left to rescue.

"We were running on adrenaline. There were no lights and it was raining the whole time, so we could hardly see.

"Reece and I were close to hypothermic by the end. We cut holes in some sleeping bags and wore them.

"I've been to every cyclone, I've done a dozen body recoveries and I've been deployed all over the place, but this was once-in-a-lifetime."

Whatever it takes

Reece said his wife was 38 weeks pregnant at the time.

"It was hard to make the decision to leave her but we needed floodboat operators," Reece said.

Richard and Reece, along with several Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) swiftwater technicians, rescued two Queensland Police Service (QPS) officers from the floodwaters.

"They'd been conducting evacuation doorknocks when their car entered floodwater and began to float," Reece said.

"Both officers were forced to leave the car and they'd been in the water for nearly 30 minutes when we found them. The first officer was holding onto a powerpole and the second was clinging to a tree in a storm drain area.

"The swiftwater technicians lifted the first officer into our boat. To rescue the second officer, we looped a rope around a power pole to stabilise the boat, then manoeuvred backwards. When we were close enough, we lowered an inflatable work platform.

"Richard and I hadn't worked together for more than six years until that event and it was like we'd been working together for a lifetime.

"At the end of the shift my mind was racing. I had thoughts like, did we do enough, did we miss anyone etc. For a long time whenever it rained or I took a shower I could hear an outboard engine running."

Both Reece and Richard gave their \$1000 donation to the Moyamoya Foundation to support people with Moyamoya disease, a rare blood vessel disorder where arteries to the brain are constricted, which may lead to ministrokes, strokes or bleeding in the brain.

Richard donated his personal prize of \$1000 to Will Prentice, a Surf Lifesaving Queensland volunteer who won the Young Everyday Hero award.

Keeping the fires at bay

For two months Trevor Turner worked every day to fight the black summer bushfires.

"It was a drought year so we only got 12 inches of rain when we normally get 36," Trevor said.

"On 7 October the fires came out of Warwick and burnt west through the national parks. With other brigades we put fire breaks in and conducted backburns to stop the fire from reaching Mount Alford – otherwise the town would have been wiped out.



Reece Booij with his partner Kate and their baby.

"The fires burnt about 1000 acres that night. We saw fireballs and treetop blazes, and we were petrified a fire would start back at home while we were away.

"Louise Armytage, a new member of the brigade, wrote up all my plans and mapping so we could run it through Incident Command and get approval for the burns. She really made the day."

Trevor said the key was conducting backburns at night when the humidity was lower.

"Winds were high and it was around 40 degrees, so we had no hope in the daytime. The fire got away from us a few times but we managed to contain it.

"I got home after midnight most days and my wife banned me from using the shower because it turned black.

"I'd get up at 4am, put out a bale of hay for our 120 cows and strip graze them by mobbing them to a different area with a temporary electric fence.

"We had no surface water on the farm and the creek was dry, so my wife started the bores and filled the water troughs by hand. I often had to run irrigation at night. We didn't have a blade of grass.

"Our farm grows lucerne hay, which we normally sell, but because our cattle were so hungry we had to feed it to them instead. We even had to buy a trailer load of hay from NSW for \$9000.

"I tried to balance stopping the fires and staying afloat myself. I lost my best stud cow and calf because the mother calved on the side of a hill with her legs facing up and the calf got stuck. I wasn't there to look out for them.

"We were struggling, but we knew we just had to hang on. Cattle prices are high now so we're doing better."

Trevor chose the Cancer Council of Queensland as his charity because skin cancer runs in his family and he survived melanoma a few years ago.

"The other \$1000 went to Merv Wood's family. He put in a bore for town water many years ago, but it wasn't used and he wasn't paid. I got grants a while ago to equip that bore and it supplies all the water we use."



Bribie Island gets prepared

More than 2500 people went along to the Bribie Island Combined Services Expo to find out how to get ready for disasters and see their local emergency services in action.

With Marine Rescue Bribie Island as the lead agency, the annual event featured the combined might of QFES, Queensland Police Service (QPS), Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS), Volunteer Marine Rescue, Surf Lifesaving Queensland (SLSQ) and Emergency Services Cadets, among others.

This is the leading expo of its kind in Queensland, with combined support and participation at the local, state and national levels in the air, on land and in water.

Volunteer Marine Rescue Bribie Island Emergency Services Liaison and event coordinator Graham Gibb said they had held the expo since 2014 and it had become bigger and better each year.

"It's a fabulous event for the island. The expo showcases the assets available should a disaster arise on or around Bribie Island," Graham said. "People need to be prepared and know who's there to take care of them."

The centrepiece of the day was a large-scale demonstration held on the water, showcasing the cooperation between Marine Rescue, QFES, QPS and QAS.

"A parade of boats from Marine Rescue, QPS and Coast Guard did a sail past to show the community the on-water resources we have at our disposal in the Moreton Bay area," Graham said.

"For the on-water exercise, three VMR 'actors' made a mayday call from a tinny that had caught on fire. Smoke started coming out of the tinny and they jumped overboard, but not before one of them shouted to the others to grab the 'cash box'.

"Marine Rescue came in with firefighters and they extinguished the fire. A police boat extracted the swimmers and found the cash box, which was allegedly full of drugs, so they apprehended the person and led him off in handcuffs.

"One of the swimmers pretended to be injured and paramedics evacuated the patient on a stretcher. It was a great exercise demonstrating to the community the interoperability of four leading agencies."

QFES had several vehicles on display and the Rural Fire Service ran a kitchen fire demonstration.

"We had support from so many organisations, including 101.5FM, LifeFlight, Maritime Safety Queensland, Department of Transport and Main Roads, Defence Military Cadets, Moreton Bay Regional Council, PCYC Cadets, Scouts, Cancer Council, Lions, RACQ and the State Emergency Service, who assisted with traffic and crowd control.

"We also have a Young Emergency Services Ambassador each year from one of the primary schools on the island who is our link with the kids," Graham said. "The young ambassador helps promote the expo in the local schools. We have a focus on the kids as they're our future.

"While Marine Rescue Bribie Island volunteers worked tirelessly to ensure the success of the day, the support, cooperation and interaction between all the agencies is the big winner, making our community a stronger and safer place to be.

"The day is all about unison – being one, being prepared and getting ready for summer."



DART field workshops

The Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) conducted a series of two-day workshops in the field, where they lived rough and honed their skills in the lead-up to severe weather season.

During each of the four workshops, 12 Fire and Rescue Service and Queensland Ambulance Service members of the AUS-1 DART team, who usually train at the academy, travelled to Pilton, two hours west of Brisbane.

They established a base of operations in an area with limited communications coverage and natural water supplies.

Brad Commens, Director Specialist and Technical Response Branch, said moving the workshops to the field gave staff the opportunity to experience real-life scenarios in different environments.

“The skills practised in these workshops can be used for any type of rescue we deploy to – cyclones, floods, swiftwater rescues,” Brad said.

“For local responses, teams can be in the field and set up the same day. For international responses, we can be on site at the State Deployment Centre within two hours and at the airport ready to go within 10 hours, to meet international response standards.

“During the Bundaberg floods, our teams worked out of a base of operations for four weeks. Our international standard is to have a base set up for 14 days for a 75-person team, but with logistics support we can extend that for local deployments.”

The participants set up field showers, toilets and communications repeaters. They then collected, transported and filtered water from a local dam for showering and drinking.

“Our water purification system uses a pre-filter and a micron filter to collect and filter the water,” Brad said. “A UV sanitiser then makes it fit to drink. We can also desalinate seawater if needed to support our team.

“We take all our own tents, electrical generators, showers, toilets, ration packs, sleeping bags and inflatable mattresses. Teams take as much or as little equipment as they need. For a 75-person international

Urban Search and Rescue team, it’s about 20 tonnes of equipment.”

The participants completed a navigation exercise where they rescued a lost and injured hiker from an isolated location using a big wheel stretcher system.

Other exercises challenged the participants’ skills in chainsaw operations and drone piloting.

The team plans to run field workshops again next year to continue strengthening their capability.



The town with a plan

A small town on K'gari (Fraser Island) was considered undefendable against bushfire just 18 months before more than half the island burned. The town would have been lost if it weren't for the community rallying together to get prepared.

Happy Valley is a tiny community almost directly in the centre of the east coast. It's home to about 50 properties and a wilderness retreat in an area of 230 hectares surrounded by a dingo proof fence. The town's water comes from private bores and power from standalone solar systems.

The Happy Valley Rural Fire Brigade and Happy Valley Community Association received the Government Award at this year's Resilient Australia Awards for their joint effort in making the town bushfire-ready.

Third Officer and Chairman Scott Bell from the Happy Valley Rural Fire Brigade said there hadn't been any controlled burns or clearing around the town for 14 years so the fuel loading was extraordinary.

"When our town was considered undefendable, that meant if a fire came through, everyone would be evacuated. Happy Valley was potentially too dangerous even for firefighters to enter under the wrong fire conditions.

"We were really concerned. Commissioner Leach had said QFES couldn't do hazard mitigation on behalf of everyone, so they needed the support of the community.

"We decided to found the Happy Valley Community Association. Every property owner in Happy Valley is a member of that association because it gives us a voice when talking to the authorities.

"We reinvigorated our rural fire brigade, which had been sitting idle, and we put together a detailed hazard reduction and fire management plan."

A town prepares

The brigade broke the town up into sectors and assessed the fire loadings in each sector. The resulting 50-page document included a comprehensive plan to prepare Happy Valley for a fire, as well as an evacuation plan and the location of water sources, high-risk areas and critical assets.

The assets included the resort, which was made of timber, and the ambulance station and helipad.

"The whole island would have been affected if we'd lost that ambulance station, because it's the only one on the island," Scott said.

"We got the plan endorsed by all our stakeholders – QFES, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), Department of



Members of the Happy Valley Rural Fire Brigade and Happy Valley Community Association at the awards ceremony. From left to right: Assistant Commissioner Gary McCormack, Russell Postle (President Happy Valley Community Association), Elspeth Murray (Happy Valley Community Association), Winston Williams (Second Officer Happy Valley Rural Fire Brigade), Scott Bell (Happy Valley Rural Fire Brigade) and Commissioner Greg Leach. Photo by Get Ready Queensland.



Resources, Fraser Coast Regional Council, Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation (BAC) and Queensland Ambulance Service.

“With the plan endorsed, we did control burns around the town and held regular community meetings to inform people about how they could prepare their properties against ember attacks.

“Together with QFES, the townspeople cleaned up the town and cleared leaves off roofs. If a property owner couldn’t come across due to ill-health, their neighbours rallied around to do the work for them. It was a period of great community spirit.

“We put fittings on every water source we could find. QFES gave us a collar tank for the helicopters, which we fed with bores. The council gave us some tanks and we fitted them with piping down to strategically placed hydrants.”

The fire arrives

When the K’gari fire started in November 2020 and QFES mobilised Fire and Rescue Service crews from the mainland, the brigade gave them the plan so they weren’t coming in blind.

“They’d never seen anything like that before and it was an important part of what ultimately saved the town,” Scott said.

“We managed to put in additional fire breaks the day before the fire came, and that night, the Queensland Police Service made an emergency declaration on Happy Valley.

“That put our officer in charge, Shane Fitzpatrick, in a difficult situation because he carried a burden of responsibility, but he had confidence in the people of Happy Valley and said we should be able to stay and defend because we had a plan. It was a courageous decision.

“On the day the fire arrived – 7 December – we did a backburn. Normally you would reconsider a backburn in the predicted fire conditions because it’s introducing additional fire to an already high-risk environment, but it was part of our plan to burn down into the fires off the ridges to reduce the ember attack, and we received the appropriate approval to do it.

“A team of firefighters did the backburn and 15 of them got trapped by the flames. The critical moment was when air support was withdrawn and the fire jumped the line. The firefighters spent an hour in a safe zone with the fire raging around them. That backburn dramatically reduced the ember attack.”

Confronting the flames

Scott said there were 100 people in town and 25 vehicles, including light attack vehicles and six large appliances.

“As the major fire-front moved towards town, a lot of people evacuated to the beach, but all the preparation really made a difference,” he said.

“When the fire-front came to my place, I stood on the road out front with three other firefighters and a flashover went straight over our heads – all these embers racing above us in a windstorm.

“In the bush on the other side of the road, the fire roared up into the canopy and some of the flames touched the house. We just had to stand there with our hoses on the defence setting to protect ourselves. There was a lot of waterbombing so it was like World War 3 overhead.”

Happy Valley is actually two valleys and the area between them is heavily vegetated, so QFES dropped more than 20 loads of water in that area to put out spot fires.



The brigade divided the town into sectors and assessed fire loadings as part of their hazard reduction and fire management plan.

“QFES also concentrated their waterbombing on a Telstra tower on a hill at the back of the town because they’d set up their own communications centre next to it. The fire came right up to the hill but the waterbombing held it there.

“The fire came really close to the town. Fortunately we’d done a hazard reduction burn on a big block owned by the Department of Education in the western end of the valley and that made a big difference. The fire roared up to it and stopped dead.”

Once the fire had passed Happy Valley it moved on to the nearby town of Yidney Rocks.

“We sent some units down there and the fire actually burnt to the boundary of some of the houses,” Scott said.

“An FRS strike team went down there and tapped into an underground water tank. They said it was the scariest thing they’d ever been involved in. When you see these professional firefighters hugging one another after an event, you know they’ve had a pretty close call.”

New growth

Scott said many important rainforest areas weren’t affected.

“The island is an undulating environment of dunes and valleys, so some pockets didn’t burn while others burnt fiercely,” he said. “Out the back of Happy Valley is a beautiful rainforest and the fire went through it, but the flames were small and only burnt leaf litter.

“Some areas will take years to come back because the trees have been totally destroyed. In other areas, the regrowth has been phenomenal. We were just out doing a survey with the Department of Resources, and in areas where the leaf canopy was destroyed, more light is coming through so there’s a lot of growth underneath.

“We thought we wouldn’t have to do hazard reduction burns for three years, but 10 months after the fire we were standing waist-deep in bracken.

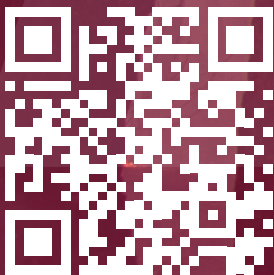
“This year we’re doing a lot of hazard reduction burns in areas around Happy Valley that weren’t affected by the fire. We’re also helping another town, Eurong, who weren’t affected by the fire but have similar issues to Happy Valley.

“We worked with BAC to do a burn around K’gari camp, which was heavily waterbombed and under major threat during the fire, and we’ve been working with QPWS in some areas south of Happy Valley.”

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From recruits to firefighters

In November QFES released a documentary following Firefighter Recruit Course 113 on their 16-week journey. After their fair share of blood, sweat and tears, all 32 recruits graduated. *Response* caught up with two of them to see what it's like to use their new skills in the real world.

Chelsea Potter didn't know what to expect when she signed up for the recruit course, but she went on to receive the Dan Campbell Award for most improved firefighter. She now works at Warwick Fire and Rescue Station.

"Working among knowledgeable and friendly firefighters made the changeover almost effortless and I've learnt a phenomenal amount," Chelsea said.

"Engaging in community events has far exceeded my expectations. Fire Ed in particular is such a highlight. I'm not sure who enjoys it more – the firefighters or the children – but it always brings a lot of smiles and laughter.

"I was surprised by the huge range of career avenues in the fire service and I'm looking forward to learning more."

One of the most dramatic moments in the documentary came when Chelsea went into a simulated burning building with several missing persons. Enveloped in dark smoke, she found a casualty but couldn't reach them because the hose snagged on some doors.

"The feeling of letting the 'casualty' and my partner down was pretty heartbreaking and it made me realise what a team environment this job is," she said.

"Nearly a year later, that one incident has remained engraved in my brain, keeping me aware of what is needed to complete a task successfully, rather than focusing on unmethodical speed."

After her induction, Chelsea had her first callout to a house fire.

"The firefighters on shift guided us and allowed us to be fully involved straight away," she said.

"Another learning experience has been how incidents affect people. A small road crash may barely register on our radar, but for someone involved it will be a huge event in their life that they will never forget.



Since graduating, Chelsea Potter has enjoyed engaging with the community.



Live Fire is one of the most intense parts of the firefighter recruit course.

"Whether it be the loss of their car equalling the loss of their livelihood, or even the fear of driving again, it's made me more alert to my own actions so I don't underestimate these sorts of incidents.

"Time and time again, I heard that being a firefighter was 'the best job in the world' and I can now say firsthand that it is."

The learning curve

Jayden Mann said the crews at his new station were all supportive of his ongoing learning and assessment.

"You learn most of what happens at a station level after you graduate from the recruit course," Jayden said.

"The biggest learning experience has been how dynamic each incident and shift can be. On my first shift we had a swiftwater rescue, a stolen car involved in a road traffic crash, forceable entry for a baby

locked inside a house and multiple alarm activations throughout the night."

Jayden said teamwork and team bonding were ingrained into the recruit course from day one.

"My advice for future recruits would be to give it all you've got. It may take multiple attempts before you get an offer to become a recruit, but showing resilience and continuing to stick at it will hopefully pay off.

"The course is demanding on your time and home life, so it's best to show up in a healthy state both physically and mentally, and with the support of family and friends."

The QFES 2023 Firefighter Recruitment Campaign launched on 1 December. Applicants can find details about how to prepare by searching for 'QFES recruit firefighter'.

Honouring our SES

The State Emergency Service (SES) Week Awards in October honoured the dedication of our SES volunteers who work tirelessly with the community.

Alex Johnson, Deputy Group Leader of Redland Bay SES Group, was named the 2021 SES Member of the Year.

He joined the SES in 1997 after he was made redundant from his job and became self-employed.

“I wanted to join the SES to keep in contact with people and help the community,” Alex said.

“I find it satisfying to watch a new member, who joins knowing nothing about hand tools, chainsaws, heights and so on, really get in and have a go.

“They may feel like they’re useless but you can see the passion and empowerment as they learn and grow.”

Alex coordinates monthly maintenance mornings, orientation nights and induction and sign-on days. He even built wooden

roof models to demonstrate storm operation and heights training to new members.

During COVID-19 restrictions, Alex took it upon himself to run one-on-one training sessions for new members so they could join regular training once the team came together.

“It can be challenging to keep new members engaged after they’ve finished their initial training courses in the first year or two,” he said. “You have to come up with new training ideas to keep it interesting.”

Alex has put his hand up for many deployments, including cyclones Yasi, Marcia and Debbie. He also travelled to Newcastle in 2007 to support storm damage operations after an east coast low caused the Pasha Bulker coal ship to run aground.



Alex Johnson was named SES Member of the Year for his 17 years of dedication.

He was recently deployed to WA in response to major cyclone damage.

“When we landed at Perth Airport, we found out WA would be in COVID-19 lockdown from 6pm,” he said.

“We were supposed to spend the night in Perth, but instead we had to fly straight to Geraldton in a RAAF Caribou. We were bussed to a basketball stadium where we slept on stretchers.

“We travelled hundreds of kilometres each day. Sometimes it took us an hour to get to jobs, particular when the GPS dropped out.

“A lot of farmhouses had lost their roofs, but the farmers were too busy planting their crops to focus on repairing their houses. Roofing contractors wouldn’t be able to fix the roofs for at least another 18 months, so we tarped them to make the houses inhabitable in the meantime.”

Alex helped with the design and commissioning of the new Redland Bay SES facility, which opened in May.

“Our group initially operated out of a shed with no running water or toilets and every time it rained, it flooded.

“The new facility was about 10 years in the making. We now have room for our equipment and training, and our group has a new lease on life.”

Alex said leadership meant treating everybody with the same respect.

“From the oldest member to the newest recruit, you offer and listen to advice,” he said. “I like helping out and getting a thank you from someone we’ve lent a hand.”

Standing together for Springfield

Ipswich City SES Unit received the Assistant Commissioner’s Shield for Operational Response of the Year for their response to the Springfield hailstorm in October 2020.

Maranda Aiavao, Deputy Group Leader of the SES Goodna Group, was one of the first to arrive on the scene.

“I was in a state of disbelief at the carnage the hailstorm caused,” Maranda said.

“This was absolutely next level. Cars were parked on the sides of the road with dents and smashed windows.

“Residents were gathering outside their houses, hands on hips, looking at the damage. Some were quiet, some were frantic,

others looked distraught. Massive hailstones were scattered across lawns.

“As far as I could see, almost every house sustained significant damage. It was incredibly emotional.

“As I was pulling on my harness to get on the roof of a house, I heard members from my team directing residents to me. At least six householders came towards me, all asking for the same thing – help.

“Phone queues were congested, tradies were swamped with calls for repairs – people just wanted help.

“It was one of the few times in orange I ever felt helpless – we wanted to say yes to all of them but realistically, the response to this was bigger than anything my unit had dealt with since the 2011 floods.”

It took Maranda’s unit and deployment teams 14 days to complete the hailstorm tasks. She was out there for 11 days, despite working full-time.

“I went out on SES tasks late afternoon, well into the evening and on weekends. I was out in the field for anywhere between 6 to 12 hours at a time.

“There were a few houses we couldn’t repair due to safety reasons, but we helped residents move furniture to another room or tarp over their belongings to prevent further damage.”

Jobs for the Springfield area continued to come in for months after the immediate event.

“My unit continued to install temporary repairs on houses, re-tension existing tarps and replace damaged tarps and ropes,” Maranda said.

“Our community supported us by being understanding when we couldn’t attend jobs straight away. A couple of times, residents came out with their pets and let us pat them as we were packing down. It definitely put a smile on my face!

“I love my unit. In the weeks after the hailstorm, the other three groups in our unit offered to look after our area so my group could stand-down and rest for a while.

“It was a beautiful gesture, but we made the decision to keep going because our group wanted to see this through. My unit is my home.”

Thank you to every SES volunteer for everything you do to support your fellow Queenslanders.



Ipswich City SES Unit received the Assistant Commissioner’s Shield for Operational Response of the Year for their work during and after the Springfield hailstorm.



CENTRAL REGION

Building capability in incident management

Late October saw 13 participants from the Fire and Rescue Service, State Emergency Service and Rural Fire Service come together in Rockhampton over five days to develop their skills through the Incident 40 Hour AIIMS/IMS Management Course.

The Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System (AIIMS) is a structured approach for the management of emergency incidents. It is underpinned by the principles of collaboration, cooperation and partnerships between individuals, entities and sections.

The course was targeted towards personnel seeking to develop their skills within a level 2 or 3 Incident Management Team.



Severe weather exercise with ADF in Mackay

The multi-agency functional exercise, Mackay Ready, kept Central Region QFES members on their toes in November.

QFES helped plan and facilitate the exercise, and engaged the Local Disaster Management Groups, District Disaster Management Group (DDMG), local emergency services and the community on a private property near Eton (west of Mackay).

The aim was to exercise multi-agency interoperability between the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and DDMG stakeholders during a severe weather event. The exercise tested multi-agency communication, command structures and deployment of resources.

ADF and PCYC Cadets were role players in the field during a large-scale search by land and air. QFES members formed the incident management team, land search operations, swift water rescue, exercise control and safety functions.

The relationships formed through the planning and delivery of this exercise mean Central Region is better prepared for severe weather events in future. Photos by Jonathan Pavetto (ADF).



Variety Bash visit to Longreach

The participants of the 2021 Variety Bash visited the Longreach Area Office this November. The Variety Bash is a charity event where people drive vehicles 30 or more years old through regional areas to raise money for sick or disadvantaged children.

The team was made up of David Lloyd from State Workshops, Station Officer Adam Martin and Firefighter Craig Squires from Brisbane, who crewed an ex-QFES appliance.

Some of the Longreach Fire and Rescue Service crews joined Area Commander Acting Inspector Kim Llewellyn to farewell the team as they left the Qantas Founders Museum at Longreach on their six-day journey to Yeppoon.



Supporting the community to Get Ready

Over the past two months, QFES members have been out and about talking with the community to encourage everyone to 'Get Ready' for the upcoming severe weather and bushfire seasons and to build awareness and encourage compliance with the 1 January smoke alarm legislation changes.

Thousands of people took the opportunity to have a conversation with our people to discuss how they recognise their local seasonal risk and what they can do to be better prepared.

An engagement technique proving to be very popular is the '30 second challenge', a simple game where a person is challenged to select items from the table to pack an emergency kit. After the 30 seconds is up, the bag is unpacked and the reasons why they chose certain items and what other items would be important to include is discussed.





NORTH COAST REGION

Time to Get Ready

QFES has been working with councils across the region for a number of Get Ready events.

Fraser Coast Council held two Get Ready events in Maryborough and Hervey Bay. All three QFES services attended to engage with community members, who listened to key messages and enjoyed some music and good food.

Noosa Council also worked with all three services to develop a Get Ready schools' program for grade five students. Representatives from the council, Rural Fire Service and State Emergency Service spoke to students at Tewantin State School and Good Shepherd Lutheran College about how their families could prepare for disasters. Students were then given the chance to explore the trucks and equipment.



Brian Prince Awards

The eighth annual Brian Prince Awards were held in Bundaberg in October. The awards recognise our local emergency services staff and volunteers who go above and beyond the call of duty.

The awards are presented in remembrance of outstanding Rotarian and paramedic, Brian Prince.

QFES members were finalists for several awards this year:

- Rural Fire Service Volunteer of the Year finalist: Robert Coghlan
- State Emergency Service Volunteer of the Year finalist: Sharyn Kilby
- Emergency Services Award for Outstanding Service (Fire and Rescue) QFES Auxiliary Firefighter: Lieutenant Darren Lawrence.



Preparing for smoke alarm legislation changes

QFES is working hard to ensure our communities are informed and prepared for the smoke alarm legislation changes, which come into effect for landlords from 1 January 2022.

Fire and Rescue Service and auxiliary firefighter crews are busy visiting hardware stores in the region, with other members delivering key messages at events across the North Coast.

In November, QFES attended the Caloundra Seniors Expo, which was an amazing opportunity to discuss the changes with all 120 attendees.



BRISBANE REGION

Vertical rescue refresher

October has been a busy month for the Brisbane Region Technical Rescue Training Team, with a heavy focus on vertical rescue.

Level 2 technicians stepped out in the sunshine at Kangaroo Point Cliffs to hone their advanced rope rescue skills. The scenarios were based on real-world rescues from around the region, including transitioning from Level 1 to Level 2 systems mid-rescue and securing a casualty in a precarious position at height.

The training paid off sooner than expected, with C shift conducting a rescue less than 100 metres from the training site the very next tour, using many of the skills the scenarios had just reinforced.

A little further afield, 11 auxiliary firefighters from the bay islands spent three days with instructors undertaking their Level 1 Vertical Rescue training. They gathered at Dunwich Fire and Rescue Station, where they were put through their paces learning the dark art of knot tying and the underlying theory of rescue operations.

Crews then braved the elements to put that theory into practice in what can only be described as the most idyllic training venue in Australia, Point Lookout. Despite the distractions of the rolling surf and passing pods of dolphins, the trainees kept their heads in the game and all came away with updated skills and a newfound respect for height.



QFES undefeated in regatta

QFES reigned supreme in this year's Head of the Brisbane Regatta against the Queensland Police Service and Queensland Ambulance Service. River conditions didn't allow the teams to enter the water, so instead they faced off over a rowing machine.

Each crewmember raced 500 metres in a four-kilometre time trial. QFES won by about 300 metres, remaining undefeated, and the trophy now takes pride of place at Kemp Place Fire and Rescue Station.

New appliance for Dayboro

In October Dayboro and District Rural Fire Brigade celebrated the commissioning of their self-funded Light Attack Appliance. Minecorp Australia built the appliance to the brigade's design and specification.

The appliance's innovative design features include a clever aluminium water tank design that lowers the vehicle's centre of gravity. This enhances stability on steep slopes and allows firefighters to use all 550 litres of water while the appliance is standing on slopes up to 20 degrees.

The lighting control system is operated from either inside the cab or from the rear pump control panel. It's programmed to provide safe on- and off-road lighting to ensure safe operations after dark.

Warning lights and buzzers remind the crew when they're running low on water and warn them not to drive off with locker doors open or ladders and steps deployed.

The brigade is grateful for the community's generosity and QFES' support in bringing this project to fruition.





SOUTH EASTERN REGION

One airport, two states, three fire services

A joint-agency training exercise took place at the Gold Coast Airport in October.

Crews from Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting (ARFF), Fire and Rescue NSW and QFES shared their knowledge and experience for responding to emergencies at the facility.

The purpose of the training was to better understand the resource capabilities available in emergencies and to continue building the relationship between all three fire services. Participants also discussed current and future communications capabilities.

With the new airport terminal extension due to be operational by April 2022, the training provided a level of confidence that the services are well prepared.



Logan road safety event

QFES recently partnered with Logan City Council, Queensland Police Service, Queensland Ambulance Service, Transport and Main Roads and the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator to deliver a multi-agency road safety event for around 500 Logan City Council Heavy Vehicle Fleet staff.

QFES crews delivered a Road Crash Rescue roleplay demonstrating patient care and how to gain access to a casualty by removing doors, roof and dash. Throughout the scenario, the crews explained their activities to the crowd and presenters from all agencies spoke about road safety and the dangers of driving distracted.



A new station for Rosewood

South Eastern Region celebrated the opening of the new Rosewood Fire and Rescue Station in November.

Since 2010, Rosewood firefighters have been sharing a facility with the Queensland Ambulance Service.

The new \$2 million station is a significant development for the area that will help local firefighters continue to meet the growing needs of the Rosewood community and surrounds.



Auslan fire safety visit

Ripley Fire and Rescue Station recently visited Ipswich Central State School where Senior Firefighter James Reece delivered an information session in Auslan for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students of various ages.

Students learnt about fire safety and the capabilities of the fire truck and were impressed with 'Firefighter Jimmy's' Auslan skills.

Students and teachers thoroughly enjoyed the educational morning, which is set to become an annual activity.

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SOUTH WESTERN REGION



Felton Broxburn welcomes new station

The Felton Broxburn Rural Fire Brigade proudly showed off their new station to guests and dignitaries at the official opening.

Special guests invited by the brigade were McLeans Farms Operations Manager Paul Keevers, Founding Owner of Moores Trailers Lionel Moore and Councillor Paul Antonio, Mayor of

Toowoomba Regional Council. McLeans Farms offered the land the station is built on.

Members of the brigade attended along with representatives from the Cambooya, Southbrook Linthorpe and West Pittsworth Rural Fire Brigades.

For an insight into the brigade's history, First Officer Paul Fuhlholm read out the minutes from the founding AGM in 1974.

Field Search Course

State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers and staff from across South Western Region undertook the Queensland Police Service (QPS) Field Search Coordinator Course delivered by Acting Inspector Jim Whitehead.

The participants will have a significant role in the land search and rescue (SAR) operations the SES performs for QPS.

The course involved four full days of theory and practical exercises to give participants the knowledge they'll need to coordinate a land search, including navigation, legislative responsibilities, emergency phases, search planning and human behaviour.

Jim explained the theory behind some of the pain points volunteers commonly experience during searches, such as the need to search areas repeatedly, which helped participants understand the need for them.

During operations, trained SES members can be recognised by the SAR badge on their uniform. They fulfil several roles including providing direct support to QPS.

Jim is a legend in the Australian SAR community and his wealth of knowledge will be missed operationally when he is required to retire from the QPS later this year.



Goondiwindi Emergency Services Day

A group of dedicated staff and volunteers from the emergency services family put on a show in Goondiwindi. The day was well attended by the local community and positive feedback was received all round.

Services that attended included Queensland Police Service, Queensland Ambulance Service, Fire and Rescue Service, Rural Fire Service, State Emergency Service, QFES Firecom, Helitac, Goondiwindi Regional Council, Department of Defence, RACQ and Queensland Health.



FAR NORTHERN REGION



Strategies for disaster resilience in Indigenous communities

The Torres Cape Indigenous Council Alliance (TCICA) hosted its second Indigenous Local Government Disaster Resilience Forum in Cairns.

TCICA Deputy Chair and Mayor of Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council Robbie Sands officially opened the event.

Eighty participants from across the region, including mayors, councillors, chief executives, council staff and representatives of key government agencies, critical service providers and non-government organisations, attended the forum. QFES was represented by Executive Manager, Emergency Management Cheryl-Lee Fitzgerald and the Far Northern Region Emergency Management Coordinators.

Participants discussed what they'd learnt from managing the impacts of the pandemic over the past 18 months. While Cape York and the Torres Strait region have not yet seen a case of COVID-19, it's likely to reach communities in the future.

Ensuring as many local residents as possible are fully vaccinated remains critical, as does the need for well-tested COVID management planning. The lack of available housing and other appropriate accommodation for quarantine and isolation remains a challenge.

Participants discussed the progress made on priorities identified in the 2019 forum, such as enhancing the resilience of public infrastructure, strengthening local disaster management groups, managing media engagement and public information, and building the resilience and capability of local State Emergency Service and Rural Fire Service groups.

Some of the new priorities identified this year include standardised house numbering systems in remote townships to allow for clear identification, staff and volunteer retention strategies, media training for key community spokespeople, maps showing locations of emergency shelters and places of refuge, and better protection for utility services.

The forum underscored the need for practical and focused discussion on disaster preparation, planning and resilience at the regional scale.



Spreading the word about smoke alarms

Our Regional Community Engagement Officer and Fire and Rescue Building Approval and Safety Assessment Officers raised awareness about smoke alarm legislation at face-to-face outreach events hosted by the Residential Tenancies Authority (RTA) staff and board members.

The events included property manager, agent and landlord sessions, as well as a session for community housing providers and support workers.

These sessions provided a great opportunity to meet stakeholders and share knowledge, technical advice and solutions for the smoke alarm legislative requirements that come into effect from 1 January 2022.

Road crash rescue exercise in Ravenshoe

On 9 October, Ravenshoe auxiliary firefighters organised a multi-agency exercise at a local festival known as Torimba. The exercise involved a road crash rescue with entrapment in the main street of town.

There was a great turnout, including Herberton auxiliary firefighters, Mount Garnet State Emergency Service, Queensland Ambulance Service and Queensland Police Service.

All crews worked together to disentangle two occupants from the car. The exercise was great for new recruits and experienced members, with valuable lessons for all.





NORTHERN REGION

Townsville takes the plunge

Under the leadership of Senior Firefighter Hal Tucker, the State Emergency Service, Rural Fire Service and Fire and Rescue Service recently partnered up with Outer Limits Adventure Fitness and the Queensland Country Bank Stadium to raise funds for the Brighter Lives, Townsville Hospital Foundation.

The fundraiser, which followed on from a similar event at Castle Hill in June, saw 300 Townsville residents pay for the privilege of abseiling 30 meters from the roof of the stadium to the ground.

Able supported by Outer Limits staff and more than 30 QFES volunteers, the six-hour event raised \$9000 for Brighter Lives.

Hal said the event sold out in under 48 hours and it was a fantastic day.

The abseil was over a direct drop, so it was very challenging. Many people were scared but overcame their fears. Even the Mayor of Townsville, Jenny Hill and Councillor Kurt Rehbein took the plunge. Photos by David Acree.



Building partnerships

The Horseshoe Bay Rural Fire Brigade recently took community engagement to a different delivery platform, engaging with children at the C&K Kindergarten on Magnetic Island.

The brigade introduced the children to activity and action stations including the Get Ready Queensland Snakes and Ladders game, phonetic alphabet, ringing Triple Zero, 'If you know knots you don't need lots', fire safety, elements of the fire triangle and looking out for injured or orphaned wildlife.

Centre Director Jenna Willersdorf said, "We believe that the whole community has a role to play in the growth and development of children. Providing opportunities for community groups to connect with our children and families encourages a sense of belonging and identity."

"Children grow emotionally, intellectually and physically through their relationships, and through partnerships we build with community. Bringing the wider community into our kindergarten allows children to explore and expand knowledge to learn and then share this learning with their families. Learning is shared and developed starting with one person, one group, one story or message."

"Through building a partnership with our local Rural Fire Brigade, the children learn and develop life skills around disaster preparation for storms, cyclones, fire and floods. Children develop knowledge and understanding of caring for our local wildlife. They develop awareness around fire safety and what to do in an emergency. These are important messages for our children and families to be aware of living in a rural area."



Well-deserved recognition

Twelve Fire and Rescue Service firefighters and an Emergency Management Coordinator recently received National Emergency Medals.

They were recognised for their dedication during the responses to Tropical Cyclone Debbie in 2017 and the North Queensland floods in 2019.

Building a better QFES

This year's Working for Queensland and Volunteering for Queensland surveys provided feedback on your experiences in the workplace.

Assistant Commissioner Stephen Smith said it was invaluable to receive feedback from staff and volunteers.

"Everyone's feedback gives us a sense of where we are as an organisation in terms of challenges and things to celebrate," Mr Smith said. "We respect that and take it at face value."

"We had over 4600 staff and volunteers respond and now we have to take those responses and do something meaningful with them."

Two of the major improvements since 2020 are positive attitudes from staff towards managers (78 per cent) and work groups (81 per cent). Job security also increased 4 per cent for staff from last year.

"This is a great reflection on our people and teams," Mr Smith said. "There's been a lot of change due to COVID-19 over the last two years, but people seem to be generally happy with their managers and work groups."

"At the team level, things are looking good. People are helping each other out and our workplaces are very civil."

Positive results were also recorded for staff in relation to having choice in how we complete our work, having the tools to do our jobs effectively, being given opportunities to use our skills and develop new ones, and being satisfied with our ability to use flexible work arrangements.

"There were concerning results for staff and volunteers for bullying, sexual harassment and work-related violence and aggression," Mr Smith said. "This is not a standard we accept, and it shows that we all need to do more to model behaviours aligned to our values of respect, loyalty, trust, integrity and courage as we work together to build a safe workplace free from this type of negative conduct."

Other areas have decreased this year, including organisational leadership, job empowerment, workload, learning and development, organisational fairness and anti-discrimination.

"We have some significant areas to look at in terms of wellbeing," Mr Smith said. "Some of the results reflect people feeling overloaded."

"When it comes to organisational leadership and organisational fairness, these have a considerable impact. If we can improve the experience of those two things, other elements will improve as a result."

Red tape also came up as a common issue, along with the balance between having freedom in your work versus leadership not giving enough direction. To address this, QFES has established the Red Tape Reduction Group, who have reviewed 22 submissions and achieved positive results for 60% of them so far.

QFES' next step is to discuss the survey findings at the team level through the lens of our values and the behaviours that align or don't align to them.

"We need to have conversations about what has been shared and why, and what we can do to address it," Mr Smith said. "What actions can we take to change people's experiences?"

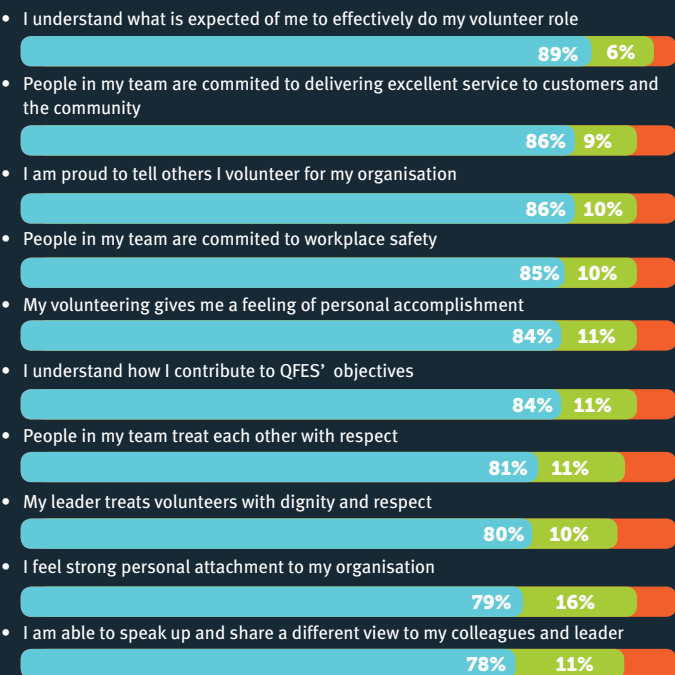
"It's not something we can talk about once and forget, so we'll track and monitor those actions to ensure we all continue to have positive workforce experiences."

Our most favourable responses

Working for Queensland



Volunteering for Queensland



Half a century of service

After 2.5 million hours of service and more than 35,000 rescues over 52 years, Volunteer Marine Rescue (VMR) Southport received one of the sector's highest honours for their dedication.

The squadron was awarded the Long-standing Contribution to Search and Rescue Award at this year's National Search and Rescue Council's (NATSAR) Australian Search and Rescue Awards.

VMR Southport was founded in 1968, and in the early days consisted of a handful of members using their own vessels to assist boats that capsized on the notorious Southport Bar.

Glenn Norris, President of VMR Southport, said the Gold Coast Seaway opened in 1986, providing a safer entry to the ocean.

"Boats don't capsize as often, but sand build-up can still create large and powerful waves, which are very dangerous," Glenn said.

"Through the 70s and 80s, we had about 250 rescue activations per year. In the 1990s this grew to around 400 and today we're nudging almost 1000."

Glenn said VMR Southport had saved many lives by being first on scene to marine incidents and medical episodes.

"Back in the early 2000s, a large passenger ferry ran aground at high speed near Paradise Point, at night, with 169 passengers on board," he said.

"Our crews were confronted with the mayhem of a boatload of people trying to escape. We transported over a dozen paramedics to the scene and returned with 10 patients – two with suspected spinal injuries and eight with cuts and lacerations to all parts of their bodies from broken wine glasses.

"In the mid-2000s, one of our rescue crews was returning from an offshore assist when they were asked to investigate a whale that appeared to be in difficulty.

"The whale was actually the large black underside of a vessel capsized by waves. Six people were clinging to the hull. Our crew rescued everyone and towed the upside-down vessel back to calmer water.

"In 2015, our crews assisted when a six-metre vessel exploded near South Stradbroke Island, throwing everyone overboard. Five people had serious burns.

A rescue helicopter transported two patients to hospital while our vessels transported four more.

"Our crews have also helped out when light aircraft have crashed into the ocean. Our role has been to search for survivors, but sadly we don't often find good news."

VMR Southport became a 24-hour operation in 1996, with radio operators working day and night shifts.

"In 2020 we trialled full-time crewing over the summer months and demand was so high we kept it going. Our full-time midweek crews still average three to four activations per day."

The group has about 130 active members of all ages and all walks of life. These range from lawyers to school teachers, self-employed to retired.

"Everyone has something special to offer, and every day this organisation achieves something great," Glenn said. "Every day we return people and boats back to boat ramps, marinas and their loved ones.

"The NATSAR Award is the culmination of everything our members have achieved, and this award belongs to each and every member who has ever been involved."



The VMR Southport crew in 1985.



The VMR Southport Management Committee.



Planning for Complex Incidents



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The Postie Bike Challenge

An unusual procession crossed Queensland this November in the form of firefighters riding postie bikes to help raise funds for an important cause.

The Kingaroy Station hosts the annual Movember Postie Bike Challenge, where past and present firefighters ride more than 1000 kilometres in the name of men's health. This year they embarked on a four-day ride from Kingaroy to Tin Can Bay and back.

Kingaroy Station Lieutenant Ryan Hall said the challenge was in its third year.

"We've been involved with Movember for more than 10 years, and after a call one day we were sitting around having a chat about doing something fun and unique for Movember," Ryan said.

"Someone floated the idea of a charity ride on postie bikes. Some of us grew up on farms and used them as farm bikes, and they're bright red like a firetruck. You don't see a lot of them, so it was something a bit different."

After three months of hard work to organise the event, 14 current and former firefighters and four support staff took part in the 2021 challenge, riding polished red postie bikes they all sourced themselves.

"We had seven stations involved this year: Kingaroy, Wondai, Tannum Sands, Caboolture, Emerald, Walkerston and Monto," said Ryan.

"The ride boosted the mental health of the ex-firefighters who came with us. QFES is really important to them – it's where their mates are. I was talking with the old Captain from Kingaroy, and he said he felt like he was back in the old days. There were lots of old stories being thrown around.

"We set a pretty cruisy pace and we kept together so we could help each other out. A highlight was taking in the beautiful countryside. We got to see a lot of areas I don't usually see."

The humble but notoriously uncomfortable postie bike presented a few challenges of its own.

"After four days I have to say I was happy to get off the postie bike," Ryan said.

"We had a few tumbles in a downhill dirt area that claimed a couple of riders. But

with a bit of duct tape and straightening we got the bikes going again. One bike's motor seized, but apart from that all the bikes made it all the way."

At time of printing, the challenge had raised almost \$11,000 and was on the way to achieving their goal of beating last year's total of about \$11,500.

"Over the past 10 years we've raised just over \$21,000 for Movember. For me, Movember is about making sure your mates are doing ok mentally.

"I see some of them on a daily basis, so I can tell if they're not right, and I ask if they need a hand with anything. I think of the fire service as a second family."



Fourteen firefighters from seven stations took part in the ride.



The participants rode more than 1000 kilometres for Movember.



The Western Downs State Emergency Service Unit held an awards presentation in Tara. Suncorp handed over Milwaukee lights and batteries the unit purchased from their Wear Orange Wednesday prize, sponsored by Suncorp in addition to the Principal Community Partnership.



QFES members and Blazer Bear jogged 4.5 kilometres in full kits for the Bridge to Brisbane run. The event raised more than \$17,000 for the Children's Hospital Foundation.



Horseshoe Bay Rural Fire Brigade members grew some impressive mos to support men's health this Movember.



Ian Ames finished his last shift after 42 years of service. QFES paid tribute to his work in Road Crash Rescue with the unveiling and naming of the Wishart Road Crash Rescue and Training Facility in Ian's honour.



At the Remembrance Day Masters Rugby League Carnival in Townsville, the QFES team played against Australian Army veterans and Correctional Services staff to raise money for Swiss 8 and Brighter Lives.



Hayden James (centre) became the first rural firefighter in Queensland to complete the New Rural Fire Development Framework Certificate II Public Safety (Fire Fighting Operations) in its entirety after it rolled out in July.



Emergency Services Cadets from Cedar Creek/Wolffdene, Highfields and Redlands competed in challenges at the SEQ Rescue Challenge. This local event was organised in lieu of the September Australian Fire Cadet Championships that were cancelled due to COVID-19.



About 200 State Emergency Service volunteers from the Brisbane City, Redlands and Moreton Bay units gathered for their annual Halloween search and rescue training exercise.



QFES launched the 'Our Job Saves Lives, Your Job Saves Lives' campaign to encourage Queenslanders to get vaccinated against COVID-19.



On White Ribbon Day, Commissioner Greg Leach urged QFES members to take action, challenge their assumptions and reflect on the attitudes that enable violence against women.



Far northern trailblazer

Wayne Coutts, State Emergency Service (SES) Far Northern Regional Director, has received a Distinguished Service Medal for pioneering developments in the SES over several decades.

Wayne joined the SES Malanda Unit in the Tablelands Region when he was 16.

"I led a team that won the State Rescue Competition five years in a row," Wayne said. "No other team has pulled that off."

"Back then, the fire service was smaller than it is now, so the SES did most of the road crash rescues and swiftwater rescues outside the cities. We also crewed the first two rescue helicopters in Queensland."

Wayne was a member of the SES dive team that searched for missing people before the Queensland Police Service developed their dive team.

"We used scuba to search for bodies in waterholes, guns and knives thrown off bridges, or cars washed off flooded roads."

"The water was often pitch black and we had to navigate by feel. To search the area thoroughly we had ropes going through the water to the other side and we'd guide ourselves along with one hand while feeling with the other."

"When we reached the other side of the creek, the other volunteers would move the rope a bit further along the bank and we'd turn around and head back along the rope searching that section of the creek."

After Wayne became the Group Leader at Malanda, he was one of the founding members of the Volunteer Consultative Committee.

"The committee raised issues from the ground," Wayne said. "In the early 90s, volunteers were given a \$5 plastic helmet and white overalls we had to dye orange ourselves. The SES didn't even issue boots. That's the sort of thing the committee helped improve."

About 15 years after he joined as a volunteer, Wayne was appointed to a newly created position to establish the SES, Rural Fire Service and Queensland Ambulance Service in Indigenous communities across the state.

He later received a Minister's Award for Excellence for the Junior Indigenous Community Safety Program. The junior program delivered safety training two hours



Wayne diving at the Babinda Boulders in Cairns in the 80s to recover a missing person.

a fortnight to primary schools across the Cape and Torres Strait.

"There were no emergency services in Indigenous communities anywhere in Queensland when we started out."

"The day we arrived on one of the first islands, someone had a heart attack in a dinghy while they were out crayfishing and they were transported to the one-person clinic in a wheelbarrow. We gave the community an ATV with stretchers and oxygen and trained volunteers how to safely operate it."

Another of Wayne's major contributions to the emergency services came after Cyclone Larry in 2006.

"When people needed help they had to ring their local SES group, who would advertise their number in the local paper and phone book."

"During Cyclone Larry, people drove into town to the council office or police station and put their address and requests for assistance on a piece of paper and we followed up with them. Months later we ended up with 18,000 pieces of paper."

"The minister and premier came to Innisfail to talk about issues. We showed them the 132 500 number that NSW had registered, and we negotiated the use of that number in Queensland so people could ask for SES assistance more easily."



Wayne during a land search with his old \$5 plastic helmet.

Soon after, the Queensland Government developed the call centre where 132 500 calls are now answered. Wayne played a lead role in rolling out the RFA Online computer system also borrowed from NSW SES.

This system allowed call centre staff to record the details online and SES across the state to manage the jobs from a computer in their local group. He also helped develop the current system, TAMS, so volunteers could access the information on tablets in the field.

Another of Wayne's passions is developing the Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) capability. QFES routinely uses RPAS in Far Northern Region to plot fire lines, live stream unfolding incidents, inspect and map areas damaged after severe weather and collect images to assist fire investigations after bush and structural fires.

"I expect soon we'll use drones a lot more for safety overwatch, delivery of rescue lines supplies, incendiary drops for lighting backburns and hopefully providing radio/phone coverage in areas that don't have traditional communications networks."

"Right now we're working on the ability to take thousands of visual and thermal photos of a search area and scan them using a computer in just minutes to find missing persons or items."



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