

### Introduction

Volunteers play an important role in the assessment, rehabilitation and release of wildlife during and after emergencies. This may include supporting the Department of Environment Land Water and Planning (DELWP) managing wildlife welfare arising from bushfire.

DELWP has new procedures for both responding to wildlife impacted by fire and to the coordination of volunteers assisting in wildlife emergency response activities.

### Addressing wildlife welfare needs at a bushfire

DELWP will lead and manage all assessment and triage activities for wildlife impacted by fire. The Incident Controller will determine if a wildlife response is required at an incident and when it should commence. If activated, all operations will be embedded in the Incident Management Team (IMT) established to manage the fire incident. Not all wildlife response activities will require the deployment of volunteers.

### Safety First

Fire grounds are dangerous, even after the fire front has passed. Wildlife rescue and rehabilitation groups must not self-deploy to search for wildlife.

DELWP has trained wildlife officers who can be deployed on the fire ground to lead accredited volunteers to help with the assessment of wildlife when it is deemed safe to do so.

Volunteers deployed to wildlife emergencies are required to work within established emergency management structures which include prerequisite training and accreditation, registration, communication and reporting procedures, as well as the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and the adoption of hazard specific safety measures.

Wildlife volunteers are not permitted to be engaged in fire suppression activities or operate in proximity to active fire at any stage. It should also be noted that volunteers who are behaving in a way that puts

themselves or others in danger or not adhering to direction will be removed from the fire ground and stood down.

### Eligibility

For fire events, only individuals who have successfully completed the mandatory training conducted by DELWP and who are physically fit will be able to be deployed to the incident.

### What do volunteers do?

Volunteers join agency led field crews of up to five people, under the direction of an accredited agency team leader.

These teams go onto the fire ground to search for and assess injured wildlife. It will involve walking and working on the fire ground, manual handling and working with animals. Teams may undertake the capture of animals for further veterinary assessment away from the fire ground.

These roles may be required to support the euthanasia of critically injured animals and disposal of carcasses as well as the capture and handling.

### Training and accreditation

DELWP has legal obligations to protect the safety and wellbeing of employees and other workplace parties such as volunteers under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004*.

Volunteers, like employees, need to be provided with the information, instruction, training and supervision necessary to enable them to perform their work safely and without risks to health.

All volunteers being deployed to undertake wildlife roles on the fire ground must:

- Hold current accreditation in the *DELWP Support Wildlife Response Activities (fire)* course
- hold current accreditation in either DELWP's 'Basic Wildfire Awareness' or CFA's 'Maintain Safety at an Incident Scene'
- have successfully completed the *DELWP Tree Hazard Identification Training*

# Wildlife and fire response

- have a current Wildlife Shelter or Foster Carer authorisation, or be accompanied by someone who holds those authorisations or qualifications
- have agreed to and signed the Volunteer Health and Safety Declaration (at the time of deployment).

The Basic Wildlife Awareness training can be accessed at <https://depi-prod.bluegemexplore.com.au>.

DELWP has delivered six *Support Wildlife Response Activities (fire)* courses across Victoria prior to the current fire season.

## How do I get deployed?

If the Incident Controller (IC) approves the use of volunteers on the fire ground, the IMT will access the list of trained volunteers. They will be contacted directly by the IMT and asked if they are available to volunteer for a set period of time.

Once confirmed, they will provide details of the deployment including where you need to register and at what time.

## What will it be like?

As part of a small team, you will be assigned a defined role and deployed to a predetermined area for the duration of your shift.

Working on the fire ground can be tiring and physically demanding so you will need an adequate level of fitness. You will need to be prepared to see dead and severely injured animals. You may also witness animals being euthanised.

## What do I need to bring?

You will need to bring the following:

- approved Personal Protection Equipment (PPE)
- basic equipment such as a day pack with water, personal first aid kit and personal clothing

## What is not permitted?

As a wildlife response volunteer, you must not do the following:

- be engaged in fire suppression activities, or operate in proximity to active fire
- work at night
- bring or use firearms or tranquillising equipment
- bring, possess or administer drugs and sedatives
- drive agency vehicles
- undertake tree climbing activities
- engage with the media whilst deployed.

## Will I get paid?

This is a voluntary activity however the IMT will arrange meals during shifts and approved accommodation. Wildlife volunteers will be financially responsible for providing approved Personal Protective Equipment

## More information

For more information about wildlife response during emergencies or wildlife rehabilitation, please visit [www.wildlife.vic.gov.au](http://www.wildlife.vic.gov.au).

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