

ABOUND COMMUNITIES · CURRIE PARK, EUROA

Leading through the flames

Preparedness, decision-making and compassion when fire came to Euroa

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WHO WE ARE

Affordable independent living for older Victorians

Abound Communities, formerly the *Old Colonists Association of Victoria (OCAV)*, provides affordable, independent housing for older Victorians. **No deferred management fees. No exit fees.** Our flagship site, Rushall Park in Fitzroy North, is the oldest continually operating retirement village in the world.

471
RESIDENTS

209
STAFF

5
SITES ACROSS VICTORIA

Rushall Park Fitzroy North Retirement village RESIDENTS ~176	Leith Park St Helena Retirement village RESIDENTS ~140	Liscombe House St Helena Residential aged care RESIDENTS ~81	Braeside Park Berwick Retirement village RESIDENTS ~47	Currie Park Euroa Retirement village RESIDENTS ~27
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W E D N E S D A Y 7 J A N U A R Y 2 0 2 6

It was the worst fire weather Victoria had seen since Black Summer.

Temperatures above 40°C for consecutive days. Winds gusting above 100 km/h in parts of the state. Soil moisture at record lows. Total fire bans across Victoria.

It was also the first full week back after Christmas. Half our exec team was on leave. Most of our managers were on leave.

40°C+

for consecutive days across northern Victoria

100+ km/h

wind gusts in parts of the state

15 km

from the Longwood ignition to Currie Park

TIMELINE

Forty-eight hours on and around 8 January

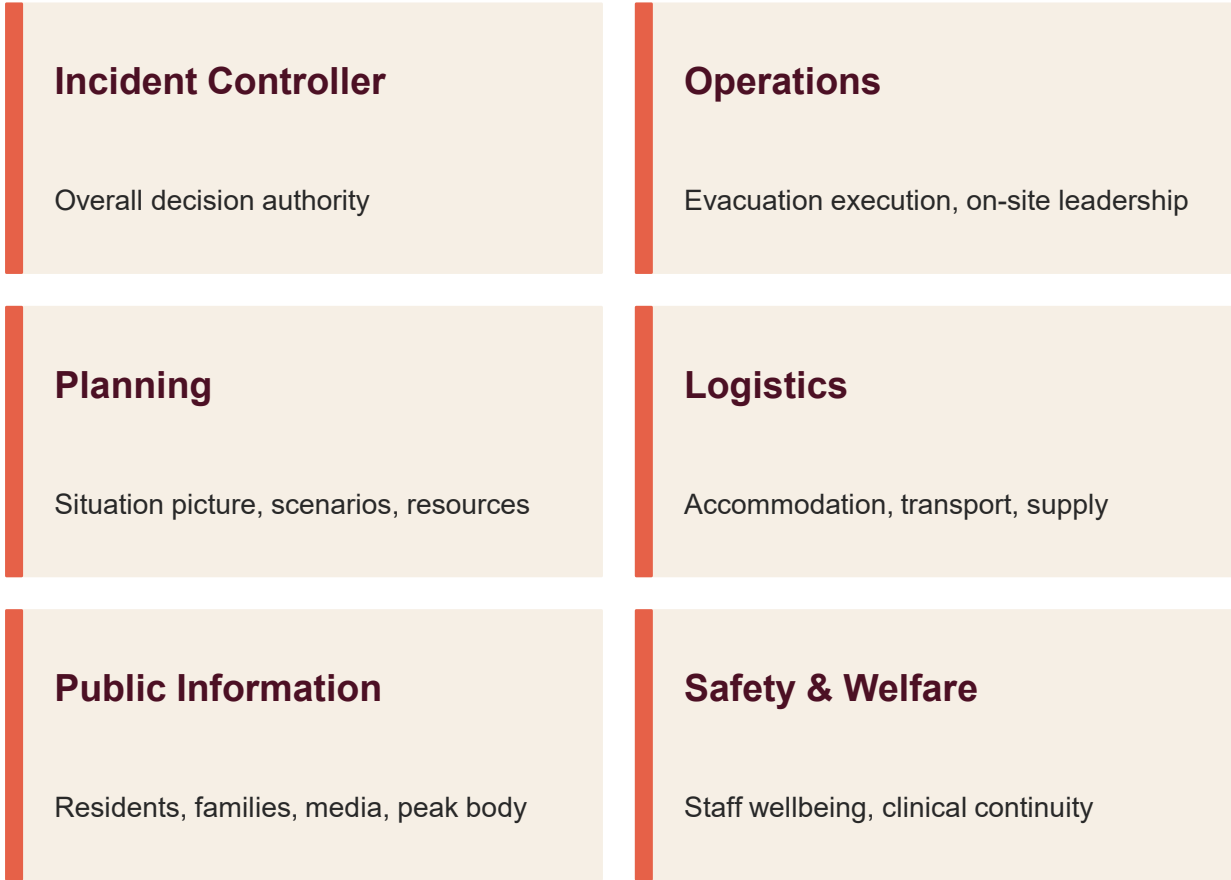


Incident Command: the structure that held

The single most important piece of preparation.

Before the season began, every member of our Incident Command Team had completed the Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System course (AIIMS).

We did not learn our roles in the middle of a crisis.



What was in place before the fire

INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT

BAL

12.5

Lowest permissible rating, AS 3959.

Low to moderate risk of ember attack... our planning baseline.

We engaged an experienced Emergency Services Management consultant to assess Currie Park, then worked through four practical considerations.

FOUR CONSIDERATIONS

Shelter in place

Could residents safely stay on site under certain conditions?

Access and egress

Routes in and out... and what happens if one is cut off?

Water for fire fighting

What supply we have, where it is, how the CFA can use it.

Facilities for shelter and evacuation

Spaces on site, and what an off-site evacuation looks like.

Consulted with residents and staff. Procedures drafted and refined with their feedback. Preventative site planning, and a personal bushfire plan for every resident.

Residents, families and staff: named channel, known cadence

PRINCIPLE

Consistent. Clear.
Kind.

When facts are changing hour by hour, what residents, families and staff need is a trusted voice at a predictable cadence, not more information.

Residents	On-site briefings from trusted staff. Families included where possible. Choice respected for those who chose to remain.
Families	Proactive updates, not on request. Named point of contact. Clear information on accommodation, meals and care continuity.
Staff	Accommodation offered so staff could evacuate their own families safely. Multiple check-ins throughout and after.
Peak body & peers	Active engagement with Ageing Australia; other providers offered alternative accommodation. The sector held each other up.

The sector held each other up

Ageing Australia

Active peak body coordination through the event. Worked with other providers to source alternative accommodation if required.

Peer providers

Stepped forward with offers of accommodation. We didn't need to take them up, but knowing it was there mattered.

Local emergency services

On-site liaison with CFA and local authorities. Careful conversations with residents who chose to stay.

Shepparton partners

Accommodation arrangements made as early as possible meant residents and staff could move together, fast, into safe accommodation.

Financial dimension: not-for-profits bear significant accommodation costs. Little funding exists for this. It needs to be in your plan.

The hardest decisions were not operational. They were personal.

“For older residents, home is more than a building. It is history, routine and connection.”

Katherine Burton, Aged Care Today, Autumn 2026

WHAT WE DID

- Supported residents who chose to stay...not overridden.
- Careful conversations with on-site staff, local authorities and families.
- Ensured residents understood the risks of the choice they were making.
- Maintained check-ins with those who stayed, as well as those who left.
- Led with kindness, empathy and open communication.

What we did well

- ✓ Stood up Incident Command on day one, with roles everyone had trained for
- ✓ Evacuated residents and staff together. Continuity of care and community preserved
- ✓ Offered staff accommodation so they could evacuate their own families safely
- ✓ Consistent, kind, and predictable communication with residents, families and staff
- ✓ Compassionate conversations with residents who chose to stay... informed consent, not overridden
- ✓ Strong partnership with the peak body and peer providers

What we would do differently

01

Deeper resident-by-resident evacuation intentions

Who will stay, who goes to family, who needs accommodation. Room by room. Reviewed annually.

02

Post emergency support

Sustained post-event support recognising emotional recovery takes longer than physical recovery

03

Formal remote-leadership protocol

Explicit playbook for executives coordinating from a distance, channels, decision thresholds, hand-offs.

04

Financial contingency planning

Provider-side accommodation costs should sit in the emergency plan, not be absorbed as a surprise.

05

Named post-event recovery lead

Activated on day one, with a 12-week plan for resident and staff wellbeing.

06

Earlier pre-season emergency services briefings

Not on the day the fire starts. Before the season begins.

Three key lessons

01

Train before the season, not during it

AIIMS or equivalent training for your executive leadership team and key managers is the single highest-leverage investment. In a crisis, the roles are already known, the language is already shared.

02

Map intentions resident by resident

Know who will stay, who will go to family, and who will need accommodation. Bake it into the emergency plan. Review it annually, room by room.

03

Plan for after, not just during

Emotional recovery takes longer than physical recovery. Build the post-event plan before the event: sustained check-ins, named recovery lead, 12-week horizon.

What every provider in the room should know

1

Train early

AIIMS for your exec team and key managers, ahead of fire season.

2

Plan for the holiday gap

Crises do not wait for your leadership to come back from leave. Build depth into your Incident Command bench.

3

Map resident intentions in advance

Evacuation planning is resident-by-resident, not site-level.

4

Budget for the invisible costs

Not-for-profits wear significant accommodation and recovery costs that funders rarely see.

5

Plan post-event care like you plan response

Emotional recovery takes longer than physical recovery — design for weeks, not days.

THANK YOU

Questions?

We are happy to talk about any part of the response, including what we would do differently.

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