

Chris Minns

Premier of New South Wales

**Jihad Dib**

Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government

Minister for Emergency Services

Minister for Youth Justice

Media Release**New RFS trucks rolled out and cutting-edge technology installed for safer communities****Monday, 5 August 2024**

The Minns Labor Government is preparing for the upcoming bushfire season with the rollout of new firefighting tankers and cutting-edge satellite technology to keep crews connected and safer during emergencies.

In a significant upgrade, RFS vehicles will now be equipped with Vehicle as a Node (VaaN) technology to ensure RFS personnel can communicate during a disaster in the most remote locations or if communication systems go down.

The Starlink satellite technology will enable the use of radios, mobile phones, and other handheld devices anywhere and at any time – even in remote areas or if communication infrastructure has been damaged during a disaster.

The upgrade will provide an important backup to communication systems and location-finding technology already in use.

It will also give crews the capability to live stream video of fires from anywhere in the state, providing command centres with the latest intelligence about an incident. More than 5,000 RFS operational vehicles will be equipped with the new technology over three years under the \$69 million VaaN project.

The RFS is partnering with the NSW Telco Authority to deliver the communications upgrade, with installations beginning this year.

The satellite upgrade comes after the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) delivered 143 new and 69 refurbished firefighting tankers to brigades across the state over the past year.

Most new trucks have been deployed to regional areas across the state, benefiting communities from Balranald to Eurobodalla and Armidale to Gilgandra, with the state's south receiving the largest uplift following the devastating 2019/20 Black Summer fires. Category 1 tankers, which are the most used on the fire front, make up the highest number of trucks dispatched across the state.

The refurbishment of 69 existing trucks will also make them safer for crews, with a halo sprinkler system for the cabin, custom-fitted heat curtains, electric hose reels, and portable Public Safety Network and fireground radio chargers.

To meet strict RFS firefighting requirements, the new trucks are being assembled locally at facilities in Kirrawee, Minto, Tomago, and South Windsor.

This follows the NSW Government's commitment to a new contract for the aerial RFS fleet, which provides certainty and a shift to a predominantly NSW-based crew over the coming decade.

The Bush Fire Danger Period for northern parts of the state commenced on 1 August, and the statutory period for the entire state begins on 1 October.

NSW Premier Chris Minns said:

“It’s important our volunteer firefighters have the right equipment and vehicles to do the job.

“These new trucks and technology upgrades will boost the protection of communities across the state.

“We are providing our first responders with communications technology they can rely on when they need it most.”

Minister for Emergency Services Jihad Dib said:

“We only need to think back to the Black Summer fires to understand how critical our volunteers and their firefighting appliances are, and we will continue to support them with the equipment they need.

“These new and refurbished fire trucks will be welcomed by local brigades and their communities, and new connectivity technology is an important addition that will make RFS trucks even safer for crews on the frontline.”

Commissioner of the RFS Rob Rogers said:

“While the existing trucks have served our brigades well, it’s important that we safely equip members so they can best serve their communities across NSW.

“Communications blackspots are a significant obstacle for rural firefighters and can make an already challenging operation even harder. This new technology greatly enhances our network of brigades across the state and will assist communities when needed.”

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