



JOINT MEDIA RELEASE: 24 July 2012

## Firefighters ramp up campaign on cancer laws

Victoria's volunteer and career firefighters have united to call on all State MPs to support their campaign for State laws to recognise the increased cancer risk faced by firefighters.

Former CFA chief Brian Potter, who faces a range of cancers after years of service at the CFA's Fiskville training ground, is supporting the campaign.

Volunteers Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) and the United Firefighters Union (UFU) are contacting all State MPs and seeking an early meeting with Police and Emergency Services Minister Peter Ryan.

The move follows recent disturbing reports into firefighters being exposed to dangerous contamination and toxins at Fiskville.

The recent Joy Report confirmed that volunteer and career firefighters were exposed to toxins when training at Fiskville in the 1970s and 1980s.

Last year Federal MPs from all parties passed a law that recognises the link between certain cancers and firefighters' exposure to carcinogens. Victorian firefighters want the same protection and support.

Federally employed firefighters -- who work at airports and in the ACT -- are now entitled to workers compensation, medical expenses and sick leave if they contract certain cancers after a period of service. The onus of proof is reversed, from the injured firefighter to the relevant fire authority, because it is impossible for firefighters to pinpoint which incident and which chemicals have contributed to their condition.

Andrew Ford, CEO of Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria, says last year's Senate inquiry heard international and scientific evidence that firefighters have an increased risk of contracting specific cancers due to their exposure to toxins and carcinogens when fighting fires and dealing with other emergencies.

"Overseas studies show that firefighters are initially among the healthiest members of the community, yet over the years have much higher rates of cancer.

"Presumptive legislation, like that passed in Canberra last year, accepts the link between firefighter's exposure to toxins and their high rates of cancer.

More...

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"Now Victoria's volunteer and career firefighters are taking a unified approach to this critical issue. If our MPs in Canberra can unite on this issue, we hope they can do the same in Victoria."

UFU secretary Peter Marshall says VFBV and the UFU will be approaching all State MPs to seek their support.

"The Greens have already declared their support for Victorian firefighters, and we hope all other Victorian MPs will take a similar view.

"Last year's Federal legislation was a unique outcome when all parties and independent MPs put aside their differences to show their appreciation for firefighters who put their lives and health on the line to protect the community.

"Without this legislation, firefighters are unable to access medical assistance and entitlements under relevant compensation law because they are unable to pinpoint the relevant fires and exposure to carcinogens"

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