



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

News Note

NOTES FOR VOLUNTEERS – 15 May 2014

Firefighters' Cancer – Fundraising to Support Our Campaign

VFBV is now raising funds to support our campaign for presumptive legislation – the firefighters' cancer law. This News Note explains why we are fundraising, what the Trust Fund will and won't do, why we need presumptive legislation, how to make a donation and other ways to help.

Why raise a Trust Fund now?

VFBV has campaigned since early 2011 for a change in Victorian law that gives CFA volunteers and their career colleagues fairer access to cancer compensation.

We have briefed Victorian MPs on both sides of Parliament, raised the issue publicly and among volunteers, and watched as the Australian Parliament, then the Tasmanian, West Australian and South Australian Parliaments all passed presumptive legislation to cover some of their firefighters.

Victoria still lags behind

While concern has grown and other Governments have accepted that *"study after study has pointed to a higher risk of cancer for firefighters than the general population"* (Australian Senate Inquiry 2011), the Victorian Government has claimed it is waiting for further research from Monash University, even though the Monash researchers have said *"...We are concerned that decisions about presumptive legislation are being delayed pending our study's findings. We believe that there is already good evidence from a very large number of previous human studies that work as a firefighter is associated with an increased risk of several types cancer..."*

The State Government introduced a new Firefighters' Assessment Panel, claiming it would "ensure prompt, compassionate and fair claims assessment for firefighters". VFBV has given the Panel nine months to prove itself, only to find the panel process only adds extra bureaucracy, gives no assistance to the sick volunteer and does not remove the unfair burden of proof on the firefighter.

Our observations of how it actually works show the panel process is not what it was promised to be; it is not prompt, it is not compassionate and it is not fair.

How will a donation to the Trust Fund help Victorian firefighters with cancer?

The *Volunteer Fire Fighters Occupational Illnesses (VFFOI) Awareness and Protection Fund* is a non-profit entity under Victorian law and will fund measures to help bring in legislation to give firefighters a simpler path to cancer compensation, including;

- Engaging expertise in research and analysis
- Accessing legal advice and conducting a possible test case
- Raising public and volunteer awareness

The Trust Fund will not provide compensation for volunteers – that is the role of CFA’s compensation system.

The Trust Fund will not fund volunteers’ applications or legal action other than selected test cases that are chosen because the outcome could benefit all volunteers.

Why conduct fundraising to establish the Trust Fund?

Our normal budget and income arrangements (including defined-use grants from CFA and the Government) are not sufficient or appropriate for this purpose and it would not be fair to use Brigades’ or Groups’ affiliation contributions. The VFBV Board has therefore established **The Volunteer Fire Fighters Occupational Illnesses Awareness and Protection Fund** to support our campaign for volunteers affected by occupational cancer, both present and future. This is a trust fund and can only be used for the following purposes:

- a) Enabling research and analysis about VFFOI;
- b) Working with volunteer firefighters and members of the public to understand the effect of Volunteer Fire Fighter Occupational Illnesses (VFFOI) on their families and communities;
- c) Working with volunteers and the community to recognise VFFOI and to take necessary preventative measures to protect the health and well-being of volunteer fire fighters;
- d) Protecting the rights and integrity of volunteer firefighters who suffer from VFFOI by taking such steps as are necessary to recognise and entrench their legal rights to compensation where they suffer from VFFOI and where necessary and in the sole and absolute discretion of the Trustees fund test cases before the appropriate courts and tribunals to determine such rights.

Why do we need presumptive legislation – the firefighters’ cancer law?

Research has shown firefighters are more likely to contract certain cancers. You are entitled to compensation, but current Victorian law forces you to show evidence of fires or incidents you attended that might be 10 or 15 years ago and prove on the balance of probabilities which incidents or which toxic exposures caused your cancer.

The Australian, Tasmanian, West Australian and South Australian Governments have all recognised this unfair barrier and changed their law so that 12 typical firefighter occupational cancers are presumed to be work related, provided the firefighter has sufficient years of service (5 to 20 years depending on type of cancer).

How you and your community can help achieve fairer cancer compensation for firefighters

Your Brigade, Group and volunteers are invited to donate to the Fund, and to promote it among the public;

- Visit www.vfbv.com.au to make a donation by credit card or PayPal
- Send a cheque to; The Volunteer Fire Fighters Occupational Illnesses (VFFOI) Awareness and Protection Fund, PO Box 453, Mt Waverley 3149
- Transfer funds to VFBV’s Bendigo Bank account; BSB 633-000 Account Number 151841970

We also urge you to talk about firefighters’ cancer law with Members of Parliament, in your local media and online. If your Brigade needs assistance and it is appropriate, VFBV can provide support in publicising the fundraising effort within your local community.

Want to know more? Download VFBV’s Notes for MPs from www.vfbv.com.au, talk to your State Councillor, call VFBV on (03) 9886 1141 or email vfbv@vfbv.com.au

Do you, or someone you know who is or has been a volunteer firefighter, suffer from one of the firefighter occupational cancers? Let us know and we can advise you of potential next steps

COMING SOON – VFBV is preparing a major petition to the Victorian Parliament – details in a few days