

Government Media Release

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DAVID O'BYRNE, MP
Minister for Police and Emergency Management
Minister for Workplace Relations

Tasmania Leads Nation on Fire Fighter Support

Tasmania will become the first state in Australia to directly compensate fire fighters who contract a serious illness in the line of duty.

The Emergency Management Minister, David O'Byrne, today introduced a Bill to establish a Presumptive Workers Compensation Scheme for all career and volunteer fire fighters.

In late 2011, the Australian Parliament passed legislation introducing similar support for a limited number of Commonwealth fire service workers.

"Fire fighters regularly put themselves in harm's way to protect our lives and property," Mr O'Byrne said.

"It's a career built on duty, courage and sacrifice. They face dangers most workers simply don't – including exposure to dangerous chemicals.

"Those extra dangers need extra protections - including special presumptive access to Workers Compensation.

"This reform ensures fire fighters and their families are fairly compensated and strongly supported in extremely difficult circumstances.

"We won't leave fire fighters to suffer without support. We'll stand shoulder-to-shoulder, in honour of their outstanding commitment to our community. It's the right and decent thing to do," he said.

Tasmania currently has almost 300 career fire fighters, and almost 5000 volunteer officers.

Under current protections, a fire fighter who contracts cancer after being exposed to toxic chemicals may not be eligible for Workers Compensation.

Under the new legislation:

- Any fire fighter who contracts one of 12 types of cancer will be *presumed* to have done so in the course of their work - subject to qualifying employment periods, and exposure through fire incidents.
- All career and volunteer fire fighters will be covered.
- Retired career fire-fighters will be covered for 10 years after retirement.
- Retired volunteer fire fighters will be covered for 10 years after the last fire incident they attended (although the law is not retrospective).
- Career fire-fighters employed before 1998 won't have to meet exposure requirements, because exposure data wasn't collected before then.
- The costs of the scheme will be covered through existing Workers Compensation insurance provisions.
- Fire fighters will be entitled to claim medical expenses, as per existing workers compensation arrangements. If they can't work, weekly payments are available under the Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation Act.

Mr O'Byrne said Tasmanian Labor Governments have a strong history of protecting workers through pro-active legislation.

Recent examples include the no-fault Asbestos Compensation Scheme, and smoke-free workplace laws.

"I've worked closely with the United Firefighters Union, which has shown exceptional commitment to its members on this matter," Mr O'Byrne said.

"Some of the personal stories I've witnessed from fire fighters struggling with illness are heart-breaking. But their courage and determination to fight is also an inspiration.

"I'm pleased we can finally offer the support they need and deserve," he said.

Further Information:

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