

**UNITED FIREFIGHTERS UNION
OF AUSTRALIA**



BULLETIN

Bulletin No: 025

Thursday 15 September 2011

To All UFUA MEMBERS

**SENATE INQUIRY REPORT RECOMMENDS PRESUMPTIVE
LEGISLATION BE PASSED TO COMPENSATE
FIREFIGHTERS WITH OCCUPATIONAL CANCER AND
TO EXTEND THE COVERAGE TO 14 CANCERS**

The Senate Standing Committee which has been investigating the “Fair Protection for Firefighters” Bill released a report today recommending that the Bill be passed so that cancer is recognised as an occupational disease for firefighters.

The Committee has also recommended that the list of cancers covered in the Bill be extended to 14 cancers to bring Australian Commonwealth legislation in line with contemporary scientific evidence and international law.

This report confirms what firefighters and the UFUA has always known – that firefighters have a higher risk of some cancers due to the exposure of toxins and carcinogens during firefighting.

The report was endorsed by the Senate Standing Committee but a minority of two Coalition Senators have questioned whether presumptive legislation is the mechanism to use. The UFUA will meet with a Coalition policy committee to ensure they understand that presumptive legislation has been proven to be the most effective way of ensuring firefighters access their entitlements.

It is pleasing to see the Coalition Senators have endorsed the relationship between firefighting and cancer as an occupational disease

The UFUA was fully involved in the inquiry to ensure the Senate Committee fully understood the nature of firefighting and the risks firefighters face as well as provide expert testimony on the relevant studies and the impact of similar legislation in Canada.

The campaign for legislation to recognise cancer is an occupational disease for firefighters has demonstrated the unity throughout the union. Without the work and commitment of the Branches, the success of this Senate inquiry would not have been achieved.

We acknowledge the assistance and support of Winnipeg Fire Firefighters Union President Alex Forrest who twice travelled from Canada to Australia to appear before the committee. Alex is the international expert on presumptive legislation for occupational cancer for firefighters. His evidence, and that of Edmonton Fire Chief Ken Block, (who also travelled from Canada for the inquiry), was instrumental in ensuring the Senate Committee understood that international research showed firefighting caused cancer, and that the impact of similar legislation in Canada had been overwhelmingly positive not just for the individual firefighters but for the fire services in general.

Just as powerful was the evidence of a number of UFUA members who provided statements and gave evidence of their experience with cancer. It was humbling to hear from these firefighters who have suffered with cancer as a result of their commitment to the community and also the experience of a widow of another firefighter who had succumbed to kidney cancer. Their courage in coming forward will benefit firefighters for generations to come.

The UFUA welcomes the report and the amendment as a significant step in the campaign to have cancer recognised as an occupational disease so that firefighters can access work cover and compensation.

The Bill had originally included seven cancers as the key goal was to have the legislation passed in Federal law.

On Monday the Bill will be discussed in the House of Representatives.

The key findings of the report are:

- That the “Fair Protection for Firefighters” Bill should be passed.
- That there is compelling scientific evidence demonstrating that cancer is an occupational disease for firefighters. Firefighters are at a greater risk of contracting some cancers because they are exposed to toxins and carcinogens in the course of firefighting. Firefighters can never be fully protected from the hazard of absorbing toxins and carcinogens as the firefighting protective clothing must be able to breathe otherwise the firefighter would perish from metabolic heat build-up.
- That the current legislation is an inadequate mechanism to achieve the objective of providing for assistance and compensation for work-related illness for firefighters.
- That the list of occupational cancer should be expanded in the Bill to include:
 - ✓ Brain
 - ✓ Bladder
 - ✓ Kidney
 - ✓ Testicular
 - ✓ Breast
 - ✓ Prostate
 - ✓ Ureter
 - ✓ Colorectal
 - ✓ Oesophageal
 - ✓ Lung cancer (in non-smokers)
 - ✓ Non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma
 - ✓ Leukemia
 - ✓ Multiple myeloma
- That the cost impact of presumptive legislation for occupational cancer for firefighters is likely to be as insignificant as it has been since similar legislation was introduced in Canada.
- That the Canadian experience has shown other benefits have resulted from similar legislation including an increased awareness of cancer for firefighters, earlier detection of cancer and therefore better chance of treatment and survival.

The recommendations in the report are that:

1. The types of cancer listed by the proposed Bill be expanded to include multiple myeloma, primary site lung cancer in non-smokers, primary site prostate, ureter, colorectal and oesophageal cancers.
2. That proposed subsection 7(8) of the Bill be amended to replace the term “dominant cause” with “significant cause”.
3. That proposed subsection 7(9)(b) of the Bill be amended to replace the term “several periods” with “more than one period”.
4. The committee recommends that this Bill be passed subject to the foregoing recommendations.

AUTHORISED BY NATIONAL SECRETARY PETER MARSHALL

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