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UFU OF A AVIATION BRANCH

Newsletter



BCOM – MEMBERS SHOULD WITHDRAW FROM PPC TESTING

As you are aware from our newsletter on 30th November, ARFF are undertaking a project for the procurement of new PPC [Personal Protective Clothing]. Your Union was invited to nominate a representative for the project and rightly expected to participate on behalf of members in all phases of the project. Your Union has unmatched knowledge and expertise on PPC by virtue of two UFU of A representatives on the Standards Australia Committees and one representative on the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO). These members are Mark Gribble, a veteran Aviation and State Fire Service Firefighter with well over 30 years of experience in fire and rescue and Neil Mangelsdorf, a long serving Fire Officer in SAMFS. Neil is also the current National WHS Coordinator for the UFU of A.

The knowledge and expertise of Mark and Neil is widely recognised with Mark having been involved with members and management in the purchase of new PPC in brigades including WA, TAS, QFRS and Melbourne. Mark has also been involved with Transfield, together with the UFU of A, and the purchase of PPE.

As you are also aware, your Union is concerned with a number of the aspects of the ARFF functional requirements specification document which is the basis on which potential tenderers will bid for the contract of supply to ARFF. Your Union submitted a "fulsome" [CFO's word] response to the draft of this document which ARFF responded to with "we have expanded or included additional information pertaining to" some of the points in your Union's response. Several significant points raised by your Union were ignored without any explanation or opportunity for further consultation. This is not good enough. Consultation is not about telling you when a decision has been made to do something and then asking if anyone has any questions. Consultation requires the provision and disclosure of all relevant information, allowing time for a response and then providing an explanation of why decisions have been made and then allowing an opportunity for further consultation and discussion. This is the kind of consultation envisaged by WHS legislation. Best practice consultation as described by the Fair Work Ombudsman is:

- Providing information about what is being **considered**;
- the process for consideration;
- how a final decision will be made and who will be involved in making the decision;
- communicating business needs and priorities;
- seeking views from affected employees through their representatives;
- encouraging a two-way flow of communication;
- considering ideas and information obtained against business requirements
- record any decisions **and the reasons why**;
- communicate decisions **and reasons why** back to employees **and their representatives**
- invite feedback on the process to improve the next consultation process.

Not much of this best practice consultation has occurred in particular, the communication back to your representatives [Your Union] and providing the opportunity for your representative to provide, at no cost to AS/ARFF the knowledge and experience of our subject matter experts, Mark and Neil.

Specification of requirements should be based on research and knowledge of relevant technological developments and available products and experience. Your Union is best placed to provide this information with our members sitting on the committees of Standards Australia and the ISO. Mark and Neil are the only end user [Fire Fighter] representatives on these committees and as a result, Mark and Neil are up to date with the latest technology and developments with PPC. Your Union has offered their services to AS/ARFF at no cost and they should take advantage of the offer in the best interests of your health and safety. It is evident from the brief and inadequate consultation with your Union that the knowledge and expertise in AS/ARFF on PPC does not come near to matching that of Mark and Neil.

There can be almost no doubt that Airservices/ARFF's decision on the next generation of PPC will be focused on cost. Decisions about the level of safety afforded to you when fighting fires must never be based on cost. There is no cost that can be attached to your life, there is no cost that can be attached to your health and safety. When decisions are centred on cost, compromises are inevitably made. Make no mistake, the quality of your PPC can mean the difference between life and death. For this reason, when advocating for the very best PPC to be provided for our members, your Union will not compromise.

Your Union is aware that ARFF are intending to conduct testing of PPC of some sort early in 2016. Your representative [your Union] has not been invited to participate in the testing or consulted on what clothing will be tested. Testing is a complex process and it needs to be ensured that any testing is valid and safe. Your Union can ensure this happens. Airservices have told your Union that "no final decision has been made with respect to the purchase of PPE for our employees" yet they are proposing to test PPE in the New Year. If testing is proposed, there has been no discussion with your Union about the product/s to be tested, no evidence that what is proposed to be tested meets the functional specification requirements and so on. How can be testing be undertaken when to your Union's knowledge expressions of interest from potential tenderers have not been sought. If expressions of interest have been sought what was the process to select the product/s for testing and which potential tenderers were short listed. Testing should not occur before any of this has been done. If all of this has occurred then it has been without the knowledge and involvement of your Union and makes it obvious that the whole process is much further advanced than what Airservices is telling your Union.

Your Union is in touch with Comcare and taking other advice on the halting of the current project for the procurement of new PPC because there has not been a proper and comprehensive consultation process as envisaged under WHS legislation and inadequacies in the functional requirement specification document. On this basis, all members should withdraw and not participate in any testing of PPC until there has been genuine consultation with your representative [your Union] on the procurement process, specification documents and until your Union is included in all phases of the project including the tender evaluation process.

Your Union will always put your health and safety front and centre and will fight to ensure that ARFF does the same. This can be done most effectively with your solidarity and insistence on the active participation of your Union on your behalf, for the total PPC procurement project.

"Unity can only be manifested by the Binary. Unity itself and the idea of Unity are already two".