



Welcome fire fighters of the world.
Stronger together!



Global Alliance strengthens

As the world economic crisis puts pressure on emergency service workers, firefighter Unions forge closer international links



IFFUA – supporting firefighters and their Unions across international borders
pic: warren frey/tas

Building support, strengthening ties

Firefighter Unions from around the world have reaffirmed their commitment to the International Fire Fighter Unions Alliance (IFFUA). In a recent phone hookup, member Unions adopted a budget for the coming year and an Alliance website strategy that will see it grow into a communications and document sharing hub.

IFFUA General Secretary Harold Schaitberger says the Global Alliance gives members the ability to exchange valuable information and gain a fresh perspective from the point of view of their peers in other countries. “We all have unique experiences and approaches to problems and challenges. By working together, we can learn from our successful endeavors – and also our costly misjudgements – through information sharing and a support structure that goes beyond our respective boards and also reaches down into the fire stations that house our members.” Harold Schaitberger is the General President of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), representing 298,000 professional firefighters and emergency medical personnel in the USA and Canada.

Meeting the challenge

In a world dominated by the international financial meltdown, planet-wide climate change, the threat of pandemics and growing violence, there is strength in global unity. “These issues don’t recognise territorial borders,” says Peter Marshall, IFFUA Chair and National Secretary of the United Firefighters Union of Australia (UFUA). “That’s why it’s so important for Australian firefighters and the Union to strengthen our international links and build campaigns to protect the workplace rights and safety of firefighters wherever they may be.”

The UFUA is one of four firefighter unions representing more than 350,000 members in five countries that joined forces as the IFFUA in 2006. The Alliance then commissioned an investigation that identified another 70 Unions around the world that also represent firefighters.

Gains to be made

IFFUA Vice-Chair Matt Wrack is also General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) representing front line fire service workers in the United Kingdom. “The Global Alliance can help the FBU by making solidarity with our struggles, publicising them and sharing good ideas for campaigning. Individual firefighter Unions can also help us by winning your own battles and explaining the lessons. We should also be sharing best practice about professional standards in the service, to further build the global solidarity of firefighters.”

Matt Wrack says the major issues for firefighters across the globe include pay and long working hours, threats to our jobs from neoliberal governments, inadequate professional standards, concerns with equipment and training, and our safety on the job. “We also face longer term challenges such as adapting to climate change, which will affect the work we do at wildfires and floods, as well as our working conditions.” ■

GLOBAL ISSUE, LOCAL IMPACT

NORTH AMERICA



With the ongoing global financial crisis, national and municipal budgets have taken hits and politicians look to balance those budgets on the backs of workers. The collateral damage of these cuts is the health and safety of our members, who are responding to more with less. We all know this is a recipe for disaster. Until we are able to get staffing and resources back to pre-crisis levels, this threat to the lives and livelihoods of firefighters everywhere will continue.

UNITED KINGDOM



The central issue is the new coalition government at Westminster, which is hell-bent on a sustained program of cuts and austerity, aimed particularly at public services. If they succeed, they will devastate the communities we serve and the job we love. We will strain every sinew to defend the fire and rescue service and the irreplaceable role of firefighters in the community.

AUSTRALIA



Negotiations with employers for new agreements have become exceedingly tough as governments impose severe public sector wage growth restrictions. We face the introduction of a national industrial relations system which could threaten staffing and rosters that best protect firefighters in the workplace. Also, a move to nation-wide occupational health and safety standards could leave firefighters in some states more exposed. It is a challenging time for the Union and the members.

NEW ZEALAND



Our issues are the same as elsewhere; fair wages and safe working conditions, including safe staffing/ resourcing levels. We appreciate we are a small Union (some 1,870 members) in a small country situated at the bottom of the South Pacific. We need the interchange of ideas with our bigger colleagues. There is great benefit in general secretaries and national presidents from firefighter unions around the world getting together as a peer group and discussing issues of common interest. ■

GLOBAL INTEREST



History was made in 2009 at the International Fire Fighter Unions Alliance (IFFUA) founding conference in Vancouver, Canada. 25 delegates and 23 representatives from firefighter Unions across the globe gathered to establish links and plot a course. Founding members of the Alliance, the IAFF, FBU, UFUA and NZ PFU were joined by officials from firefighter unions in seven other European, Central American and the Middle Eastern countries.



FINLAND



ICELAND



IRELAND



ISRAEL



MEXICO



NORWAY



SWEDEN

Stronger links, closer ties



Information sharing will be the major focus of the IFFUA website now under construction and soon to be launched. The IAFF, in conjunction with the US National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), has recently completed a time-to-task crew size study that provides scientific data supporting fully staffed rigs. The report, as well as a program called *Fireground Survival*, will be posted on the website.

From the UK, the FBU's *Pathfinder* trials that focused on how fire cover was provided will be added, as well as a climate change report from Australia. Both reports recommend that increasing firefighter staffing levels is the most effective form of protection.

The IAFF will share details of a new personal protective flat pack providing firefighters with state-of-the-art breathing apparatus. This project is now entering the manufacturing phase of development. The North American firefighter Union is also participating in a project initiated by an affiliate that will better measure the importance of firefighter work by focusing on the value of property saved.



International Standards

During the recent IFFUA phone conference, NZ Professional Firefighters Union Secretary Derek Best and UFUA National Secretary Peter Marshall emphasised the importance of firefighter participation on the International Standards Organisation's (ISO) personal protective equipment committee. With Australian Mark Gribble as the only firefighter



pic. © martin jenkinson

represented on the committee, it is dominated by equipment manufactures and government finance representatives. Derek and Peter say IFFUA should focus its attention on this ISO committee.

Turning the trend

In the USA, the IAFF's successful lobbying for federal grants funding has seen over \$630 million allocated across 2009-2010 to help fire departments maintain staffing levels as municipal budgets are cut. An initial \$150 million has brought back or refilled approximately 1,100 firefighter jobs. The remaining 2010 money should equate to an additional 3,400 jobs saved or refilled. Another \$420 million is likely to be made available in 2011.

With the whole world suffering the impact of the international financial crisis, the IAFF's successful campaigning techniques can offer valuable insights for firefighters and their Unions battling cuts in other countries.



Counter moves

With the New Zealand Union facing a secret management review of firefighter conditions, NZPFU Secretary Derek Best says "the employers are clearly well organised internationally; they meet together regularly and exchange and learn by their experiences. What the employers propose in one country is quickly adopted elsewhere."

Derek believes the International Fire Fighter Unions Alliance (IFFUA) provides the forum to help firefighters anticipate these attacks, learn from others' experiences and be better prepared to defend what they presently have. "Its value or benefit is really the same as to why individual firefighters ought to belong to their own National Union; there is Strength in Unity". ■