



IN BRIEF



Killer blast

Last year's explosion and fire at a cool store in New Zealand killed senior firefighter Derek Lovell and injured seven others. "An investigation found there were no signs warning that flammable gas was present," says Peter Marshall.



Learn more

Check out the next edition of The Australian Firefighter magazine for more detail on the OH&S hazards facing firefighters, including those posed by refrigerants. The next edition is out soon.



Mayday!

April 28 marks Workers Memorial Day, when Australian Unions, workmates and families stop to remember all those killed or injured as a result of their work. "One work related death is one too many," says Peter Marshall.

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The UFUA's OH&S Coordinators want an end the use of foam containing surfactants. These wetting agents improve spread and coverage but are environmentally damaging and contain carcinogenic organic compounds. pic: stockxpert

Cool 'n' risky

Highly flammable and explosive hydrocarbon refrigerants are a worry for firefighters

They were first introduced in the 19th century but their use is on the rise again. Hydrocarbon (HC) refrigerants are increasingly replacing fridge gases that attack the ozone layer or contribute to global warming. However, they're a potential hazard for firefighters.

"Our OH&S coordinators say that these hydrocarbon refrigerants pose a risk on the fire ground," says UFUA National Secretary, Peter Marshall. "There have been explosions and injuries in workplaces."

In New Zealand, a 2008 fire report says fire service awareness of the large scale use of flammable

refrigerants in the country could have prevented a firefighter's death.

"The Union has written to Federal Minister Kim Carr asking him to establish a framework to address the risk and regulate HC use," says Peter Marshall. "We're also alerting all fire services seeking their support for the Union's approach to government — and to highlight the risks to all firefighters."

An alternative to HC refrigerants is carbon dioxide. It's non-flammable, but CO2 is toxic above certain concentrations and contributes to global warming.

H2 WHAT?

Bottled water might be handy when the going gets warm, but do you know what's leaching from the plastic bottle? "The chemical Bisphenol A (BPA) is used in the production of plastic water bottles," says Peter Marshall. "However, its use is banned in Canada." BPA is a hormonally active chemical and in high concentrations can stimulate cancer cells. "The Union's OH&S coordinators are

concerned, given that firefighters consume high volumes of bottled water to prevent metabolic heat stress at work," says Peter Marshall. "I wrote to the federal minister, but a reply from Food Standards Australia is not totally satisfactory." OH&S coordinators will be keeping a watch on developments, gathering more information and alerting members to the potential risk.