



BRIEFS



Tough ruling

35 year MFB veteran Richard Zapart was severely injured while fighting a factory fire in Melbourne's west. He was assessed as 83% impaired but not permanently incapacitated; his support payments were limited as a result.



Richard's plea

"When any employee is injured in a workplace accident through no fault of their own, they should be covered for the duration of their rehabilitation, not by an arbitrary timeline set down by the Government."



Bravery rewarded

Firefighters Mark Fincher, Brian O'Connell and Russell Johnson who risked their lives to rescue Richard Zapart from the Yarraville fire have received Valour Medals from the MFB for their outstanding bravery.

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Get back to work!

Flaws in WorkCover revealed as a severely injured firefighter is told to return to work

Firefighter Richard Zapart suffered injuries to more than 90% of his body when caught in a flashover while fighting a factory fire in late 2007. Richard is from Altona, in Melbourne's western suburbs, and spent six weeks in a coma after the incident. He received multiple skin grafts to repair his body and still has physiotherapy every day to stretch his damaged skin.

The tips of Richard's fingers were burnt off, leaving him unable to even pick up a hose. Nevertheless in April, Victoria's WorkCover

stopped his support payments and he was ordered back to work. Richard Zapart was gutted by the decision.

The UFU says Richard's devastating situation is a call to arms for all firefighters to campaign for better protection at work. "Our members put their lives on the line to protect the community," says UFU Victorian Branch Secretary, Peter Marshall. "Our firefighters deserve to be supported when they get hurt at work. We are fighting tooth and nail to ensure this kind of thing never happens again."

LIMITED PROTECTION NOT GOOD ENOUGH

Under current arrangements in Victoria, an injured firefighter's wage support is reduced after 52 weeks of the initial injury. This is regardless of how bad the individual is hurt or whether they are physically able to return to work.

"We are seeking to have 104 weeks protection enshrined in our next enterprise agreement with the MFB," says Peter Marshall. "Firefighters

deserve at least this level of protection; the limited support period mandated by WorkCover and state government regulation is just not good enough for severely injured Members."

Richard Zapart's story – and the suffering he has endured – are reminders of just how important it is to have the best protection in place for as long as required.