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Firefighter's call on Australia's political parties to address firefighter cancer and PFAS blood contamination

Australia's firefighters are calling on all political parties and candidates at the coming Federal election to commit to addressing firefighter cancer and PFAS blood contamination.

The United Firefighters Union of Australia is calling for the number of cancers covered by firefighter presumptive legislation to be expanded from 12 to 19, and for therapeutic blood donations to be permitted as a method for firefighters to reduce the concentration of PFAS in their blood.

PFAS (per- and poly-fluorinated alkyl substances) are linked to cancer and have historically been widely used in firefighting foams by fire services, in airports and military and industrial facilities.

United Firefighter Union of Australia President Greg McConville said that despite a legislative review and recommendations by an Australian Senate Committee, which were completed in 2020, the current Federal Government had still not taken any action.

"Firefighters who've dedicated their lives to protecting others deserve to be protected under law when they develop cancer as a result of the deadly toxins they are exposed to in the course of their work.

"Due to the extensive and complex range of toxins released in structure and vehicle fires, firefighter cancer is on the rise and it's time for the next Australian Government to step up its protection of firefighters by increasing the number of cancers covered under presumptive legislation from 12 to 19.

"As international pressure grows with several Canadian provinces recently increasing the number of cancers covered for firefighters under their presumptive legislation, it's clear the next Federal Government must make the protection of firefighters from cancer a key priority."

Mr McConville said that the seven additional cancers would include Thyroid, Pancreatic, Skin, Cervical, Ovarian, Penile and Lung cancer.

"The addition of Cervical and Ovarian cancer to presumptive legislation is particularly important. With a growing number of women becoming firefighters it's critical that we put in place measures to protect their long term health."

Therapeutic blood donations to reduce PFAS blood contamination in firefighters

The United Firefighters Union of Australia is also calling on all political parties and candidates to approve therapeutic blood donations as a method for firefighters to reduce the concentration of PFAS in their blood.

A [recent ground breaking Australian study](#) found that regular blood and plasma donations can reduce the concentration of PFAS in firefighter's blood by up to 30 per cent.

Mr McConville said that this constituted a major breakthrough, as previously there was no known method to reduce the levels of PFAS in the blood, which bioaccumulates in the body and does not break down.

"Therapeutic blood donation offer real hope to firefighters and other members of the community who have been exposed to PFAS and retain high levels of the deadly toxin in their blood.

"The removal of PFAS from firefighter's bodies via therapeutic blood donation will also assist in reducing the incidence of cancer and it's absolutely critical that the next Federal Government permit this activity as a matter of urgency.

Therapeutic blood donation (venesection) is already supported by Medicare in cases of hemochromatosis.

Ken Wood, was an ACT Fire and Rescue firefighter who died in 2015 after being diagnosed with colorectal, liver, lung and secondary lung cancer.

At a special ceremony on 6 May to add Ken's name to the National Emergency Services Memorial, Robyn Wood (Ken's Widow) urged fire services to implement annual health screening for firefighters and supported Mr McConville's calls to add further cancers to presumptive legislation and introduce therapeutic blood donations for firefighters.

"Ken was I believe the first to establish under firefighters presumptive workers' compensation legislation that his death was caused by his occupation.

"This has led the way for other firefighters past and current to proceed with their claims.

"Ken experienced a Toluene Di Isocyanate spill on the Federal highway in 1982. He and his fellow firefighters, assisted by the United Firefighters Union, fought a legal battle for 16 years to win some small amount of workers compensation.

"While the compensation scheme has improved since, and firefighter uniforms, foams, trucks and practices have all improved, firefighters are getting cancer at higher rates than ever.

"With all of this in mind, it is my greatest wish that we keep challenging Governments to put into place comprehensive health screening all firefighters throughout their careers.

"Health screening to detect the early signs of cancers might well prevent early death. Early intervention increases the chance of survival and cure.

"This will lower the amount of claims that can and will be made in the future.

“If we can reduce the risk of firefighter cancer, Ken would be pleased to know that his suffering was not in vain.”

ACT UFU Secretary Greg McConville is available for interview and comment on 0488 000 465

MEDIA CONTACT: Darren Rodrigo 0414 783 405



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WHAT	The United Firefighters Union of Australia will call on all Federal election parties and candidates to commit to addressing firefighter cancer and PFAS blood contamination and for the ACT Government to introduce health screening for ACT firefighters.
WHO	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greg McConville – United Firefighters Union Secretary• Robyn Wood – widow of Ken Wood, an ACT Firefighter of 28 years who died of cancer in 2015.
WHEN	<u>Tomorrow 10am</u> Friday 6 May, 2022
WHERE	National Emergency Services Memorial Rond Terrace Parkes, ACT
MEDIA CONTACT	<u>ACT UFU Secretary Greg McConville is available for interview and comment on 0488 000 465</u> Media: Darren Rodrigo 0414 783 405

