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# BULLETIN

**Bulletin No: 011 29 September 2017**

## TO ALL UFUA MEMBERS

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**UFUA LEADS THE WAY FOR AUSTRALIAN**

**FIREFIGHTER WELLNESS INITIATIVES FOLLOWING**

**SUCCESSFUL WELLNESS CONFERENCE**

Once again, the UFUA is at the forefront of progressing firefighter health and safety as Australian firefighters’ health and wellbeing programmes are now in our sights as a result of the UFUA Wellness Workshop held in Hobart this week.

The UFUA Wellness Workshop was attended by Fire Chiefs and key operational staff as well as management from fire agencies across Australia. Also in attendance were firefighters and UFUA officials from various states and territories as well as our colleagues from New Zealand.

The feedback from those in attendance was that the hugely informative presentations from the incredible calibre of presenters will mean that wellness initiatives are now not just on the radar but the fire agencies are now armed with the tools and a roadmap to work with the UFUA to get the programmes underway here in Australia.

The Firefighter Wellness Workshop built upon the UFUA National Office facilitating the first Global Firefighters Cancer Conference to be held in Australia, and the first Global Post Traumatic Stress and Firefighting conference in 2016.

These conferences followed the successful implementation of presumptive legislation following the UFUA National Office campaign to have firefighters’ occupational cancer recognised so that firefighters could access their entitlements and compensation as they would for any other work-related injury.

The success of the presumptive campaign began with the Australian Federal Parliament unanimously supporting the “Fair Protection for Firefighters” Bill in 2011 resulting in 12 cancers being presumed to be occupational illness for firefighters.

The Senate Report resulting from a robust Senate Inquiry, and the Federal legislation laid the solid foundations for the campaign for similar legislation in every state and territory. That Senate Report is considered highly credible as a definitive case for presuming specific cancers are firefighters’ occupational illnesses and is being relied upon by other international jurisdictions where the campaign continues by firefighters and their unions.

The Australian Federal legislation (which covers federal firefighters in the ACT and Aviation) was quickly followed by presumptive legislation being enacted in Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia, Northern Territory and Queensland. A Bill is currently before the Victorian Parliament which will only leave NSW to legislate to protect its firefighters.

**2013 UFUA Global Forum on Occupational Cancer in Firefighters**

The campaign for presumptive was further supported through the UFUA’s Global Firefighters Cancer Conference held in Melbourne in 2013 included international renown researchers and epidemiologists, firefighter exposure and uniform experts, International Trade Union Confederation representation, lawyers and Australian Federal politicians. In attendance were fire agency operational management leaders, firefighters and union officials from Canada, Finland, Denmark, New Zealand and throughout Australia.

That conference cemented the global connection for the campaign to have all firefighters’ occupational illness understood and recognised.

Even though the UFUA was well on its way to have presumptive legislation enacted in almost every state and territory, the UFUA’s policy was only being partially implemented. The UFUA is dedicated to ensuring all firefighters’ occupational illness is recognised and firefighters can easily access all support.

**2016 UFUA Post Traumatic Stress and Firefighting Conference**

As a result, the next step was to put firefighter mental health and wellness on the agenda. In 2016 the UFUA facilitated the Post Traumatic Stress and Firefighting Conference drawing again on the experience of our international colleagues. Once again, the audience was drawn from all facets of the industry with fire chiefs, fire agency management UFUA officials and firefighters from around Australia and New Zealand. Edmonton Fire Chief Ken Block and Winnipeg Firefighters Union President & IAFF Canadian Trustee Alex Forrest outlined the progress and developments in having PTS included in presumptive legislation in North America.

That conference has naturally flowed into promoting firefighter wellness initiatives resulting in the UFUA Wellness Workshop held in Hobart this week.

We have always understood that achieving presumptive legislation was just the first step in protecting firefighters’ health and wellbeing. The success and sustainability of the legislation is enhanced with programmes that provide for early detection of illness combined with confidential, non-punitive and voluntary health and wellbeing programmes.

**2017 UFUA Firefighter Wellness Workshop**

“Riveting”, “We have to do this – we can do this – and now we have the information to do this” are just some examples of the feedback from attendees at the UFUA Wellness Workshop held in Hobart on Monday and Tuesday this week.

The calibre of speakers provided an extensive scope of current firefighter wellness and fitness initiatives underway in the USA, Canada and a police initiative in Australia.

Once again, the IAFF were generous in sharing not only their experiences but gave the audience the building blocks and key components of programmes as well as the learnings from earlier issues and mis-steps.

Winnipeg Firefighters Union President and IAFF Canadian Trustee Alex Forrest provided an overview of the context of firefighter illness, global presumptive legislation and the IAFF’s journey to implement the IAFF Wellness Fitness Initiative across the USA and Canada. Alex’s overview set the scene and provided the foundations for developing similar wellness initiatives here in Australia.

Former Tasmanian Minister for Police and Emergency Services David O’Byrne’s presentation gave insight into the political machinations in getting legislation over the line with his experience and critical role with the firefighters’ occupational cancer presumptive legislation in Tasmania.

MFB Commander Phil Taylor’s presentation followed with an analysis of the physical employment standards of 5 USA and Canadian fire departments that he visited in 2015, as well as the outcomes of an international conference that canvassed the lifespan of a career of a firefighter from recruitment to retirements and covering issues such as legal and human rights issues, validity of tests and standards, age-related issues, the impact of load carriage of PPE ensembles, standard setting and the development of medical standards and guidelines.

The international overview segued in the Australian experience with NSW Police Health and Fitness Officer Sergeant Mick Stierli’s presentation of his experience in designing, developing and implementing the Physical Training Instructors Program that is now throughout NSW. Under Mick’s guidance fitness and wellbeing hubs have been developed that continue in having huge success in not only treating injured police officers but significantly reducing the time off work and reconditioning the police officers to not just be fit for duty but reconditioned to a higher wellness standard. The approach includes fitness support (training, physio etc) but also mental wellness and general wellness such as dietary assistance.

Edmonton Fire Chief Ken Block and Edmonton Firefighters Union President Greg Holubowich not only talked the talk but walked the walk presenting together on the Alberta wellness model which is founded on a strong collaborative fire service management-union relationship. They stepped through the relationship building principles and detailed the highly successful Edmonton holistic programme, and provided insight into the plans for expansion.

UFUA National OH & S Coordinator Neil Mangelsdorf shared his vision for wellness initiatives drawing on his experience visiting IAFF programmes in the United States and the NSW Police programme. Neil will be instrumental in the development of the Australian programmes.

Overall the UFUA Wellness Workshop gave all attendees a comprehensive overview of the current wellness and fitness initiatives as well as an understanding of the necessary components and how to avoid the pitfalls the international trail blazers had encountered in the early stages of their programmes. We now have the tools to work together to implement similar wellness fitness initiatives here for the benefit of Australian firefighters.

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*Authorised by National Secretary Peter Marshall*